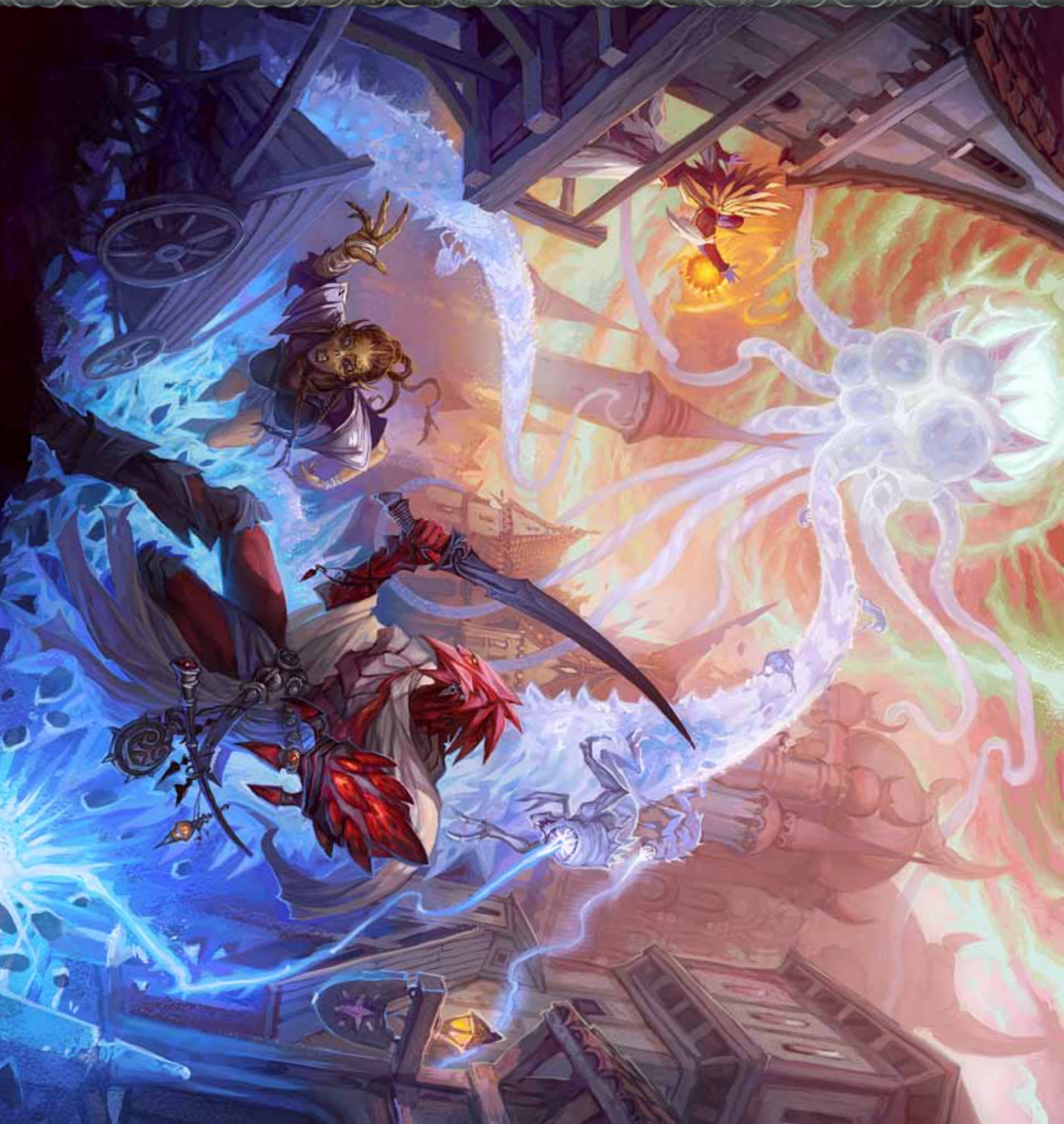
ISSUE 394 | DECEMBER 2010

DRAGON

A Dungeons & Dragons® Roleplaying Game Supplement



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ISSUE NO. 394

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DRAGON

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DRAGON December 2010

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Houston Rockets vs. the Transit Board

Before I came to work at TSR lo those many years ago, I was a newspaper reporter. A "city desk" reporter, to be precise. Instead of covering glamorous sports events or exciting fires and car crashes, I covered transit commission meetings and school board elections.

Try as I might, it was hard to make that type of material engaging to the average subscriber. Given a choice between reading budget proposals for the bus system or box scores for the NBA finals, most people turn to the sports page. The fact is, though, they'd be better off reading the transit commission minutes, because the transit commission is spending their money. If you think your taxes are too high and want to know where all that money is going, you won't find the answer in an interview with Moses Malone (look him up, you kids).

What does that have to do with the Dungeons & Dragons® game?

Just this—every month when we lay out our table of contents and editorial calendar, we face a tug-of-war between the classes and races that are the most popular and draw the most readers, and those that actually need some reinforcement but which aren't as widely played. This begs the question of why certain classes and races are more popular than others—is it because they have the most feats and powers, or because they're the most appealing fantasy archetypes? We're pretty sure it's a mixture of both, but the ratio is open to a lot of passionate debate.

The new *D&D Character Builder* is in a unique position to answer some of those questions.

From our position as game designers and magazine editors, we're beside ourselves with excitement that the new *D&D Character Builder* provides feedback on the types of characters that players are building. It's way too early to draw conclusions—as John Feil cautions, "the data is interesting but not yet useful." It will become useful with time, and we intend to make the most of it in our effort to keep improving the magazines and delivering articles that players will actually use.

I've been involved in publishing D&D for a lot of years, and this is the first time we've ever had information like this. We've always had theories based on book sales, surveys, anecdotes, and customer feedback in every form imaginable. Suddenly, we have actual data.

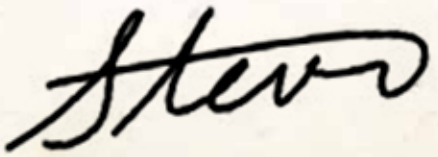
Let me tell you—it's thrilling.

All we're looking at is numbers: how many fighters are there compared to wizards, how many half-elves compared to humans and minotaurs, how many 15th-level characters compared to 5th-level.

The core question is how to put the data into action. If fighters outpull druids five to one, does that mean we should devote more articles to fighters because they're the most popular and the most likely to draw readers? Or should we lean more heavily toward druids in an effort to boost their popularity?

We have a lot of work ahead figuring out what it all means and how to put it to use. We're still giddy that for the first time ever, we can base those decisions on something real. That's big.

Let us know where you stand: do you want to see more articles on what's most popular or what's most in need of a boost? Email your opinion to dndinsider@wizards.com.



Assassin

By Rodney Thompson

Illustrations by Eric Belisle, Ben Wootten, and UDON

Assassins embrace shadow magic and pledge a shard of their souls to the Shadowfell to gain their power. By replacing a fundamental part of themselves with a dark reflection, they can manifest that piece of shadow to accomplish incredible things. The infusion of shadow magic allows assassins to identify weak points in an opponent's defenses so that with a few moments of study they can reduce the stoutest enemies to corpses.

An assassin usually keeps his or her profession a secret, since few trust those who regularly deal in death. Assassins' guilds provide some measure of protection, especially in those regions where the study of shadow magic and assassination as an art form are banned.

As an assassin, you are an outcast. You traded away a part of your soul for the power of death, and only the most-loyal companions accept your skills into their midst. Whatever drew you onto the assassin's path, you become a trained killer from whom few can escape unharmed.

The type of assassin you can create with this article is the executioner.

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Executioner

Martial and Shadow Striker: Your sense of timing, skill with weapons, and ability to use the shadows as a weapon allow you to strike with lethal effect against an unsuspecting foe. You even mix in some shadow magic when appropriate.

Key Abilities: Dexterity, Charisma

Executioners are more than just assassins for hire. When someone wants to send a message through an assassination, an executioner arranges the death in such a way that the message is delivered with maximum effectiveness. This might mean the quiet poisoning of a crooked merchant to warn other merchants to deal fairly, or it could be a public execution of a tyrannical noble, meant to frighten the leaders of an area into treating the common folk more humanely. Though many executioners perform these deeds at the request of a third party, others might do what they do in order to accomplish personal goals related to battling evil or enforcing justice.

Executioners rely on their effectiveness as both infiltrators and assassins to get the job done. They dabble in shadow magic, which lets them walk through walls, create artificial shadows, and craft illusions to hide their intrusion into secure areas. They also master the art of poison use, giving them the ability to strike at enemies both directly and indirectly.

Adventuring executioners tend to perform their assassinations in the pursuit of the goals of their fellow adventurers, using such killings to influence the party's allies and enemies. An executioner stands as a capable warrior, even when not performing an assassination. This quality makes the executioner an invaluable member of an adventuring party that frequently finds itself immersed in conflict.

Executioner Traits

Hit Points: You start with hit points equal to 12 + your Constitution score. You gain 5 each time you gain a level.

Bonuses to Defenses: +1 to Fortitude, +1 to Will

Healing Surges per Day: 7 + your Constitution modifier

Armor Proficiencies: Cloth, leather

Weapon Proficiencies: Simple one-handed melee, military one-handed melee, garrote, simple ranged, blowgun, bola, shortbow

Implement Proficiencies: Ki focuses

Class Skills: Acrobatics (Dex), Arcana (Int), Athletics (Str), Bluff (Cha), Endurance (Con), Insight (Wis), Intimidate (Cha), Perception (Wis), Stealth (Dex), Streetwise (Cha), Thievery (Dex)

Trained Skills: Stealth, plus four more from the list of class skills

Creating an Executioner

This section walks you through the steps of creating an executioner. As you make choices at each step, consider how those choices relate to your character's personality, history, and goals.

Consult the three class tables, one for each tier of play, for a summary of what you gain as you advance in level.

Assassins' Guild

When you create your assassin, you must choose which guild you belong to. The executioner assassin has a choice between the Red Scales and the League of Whispers, though your Dungeon Master might substitute his or her own guild names and descriptions for these. Your choice of guild determines some of your weapon proficiencies and the kinds of special attack techniques you learn throughout your career.

Red Scales

This order of assassins works to keep society in balance. If any organization grows too powerful, too corrupt, too wealthy, or too vile, the Red Scales weigh and measure the members of that organization and then collect a payment that they are owed in blood. Though one might call the Red Scales idealists, none can say what truly drives them. Rumors abound that this guild's Grandfather of Assassins is touched by some planar entity. They say that his eyes are orbs of golden fire, a feature he gained, along with his new policies, only after he returned from a journey to the distant East.

League of Whispers

The very existence of this guild of executioners is often dismissed as myth or urban legend. The League of Whispers keeps its membership a secret. Although individual members might be known as assassins, their association with the guild is rarely more than a matter of speculation for nonmembers. The league keeps its existence a mystery by executing anyone who discovers the truth. The order holds secret meetings once every full moon, where the members converge to discuss jobs, trade secrets and tricks, and receive orders from their Grandfather of Assassins.

Race

Choose your race. Drow, human, and revenant make good choices for an executioner.

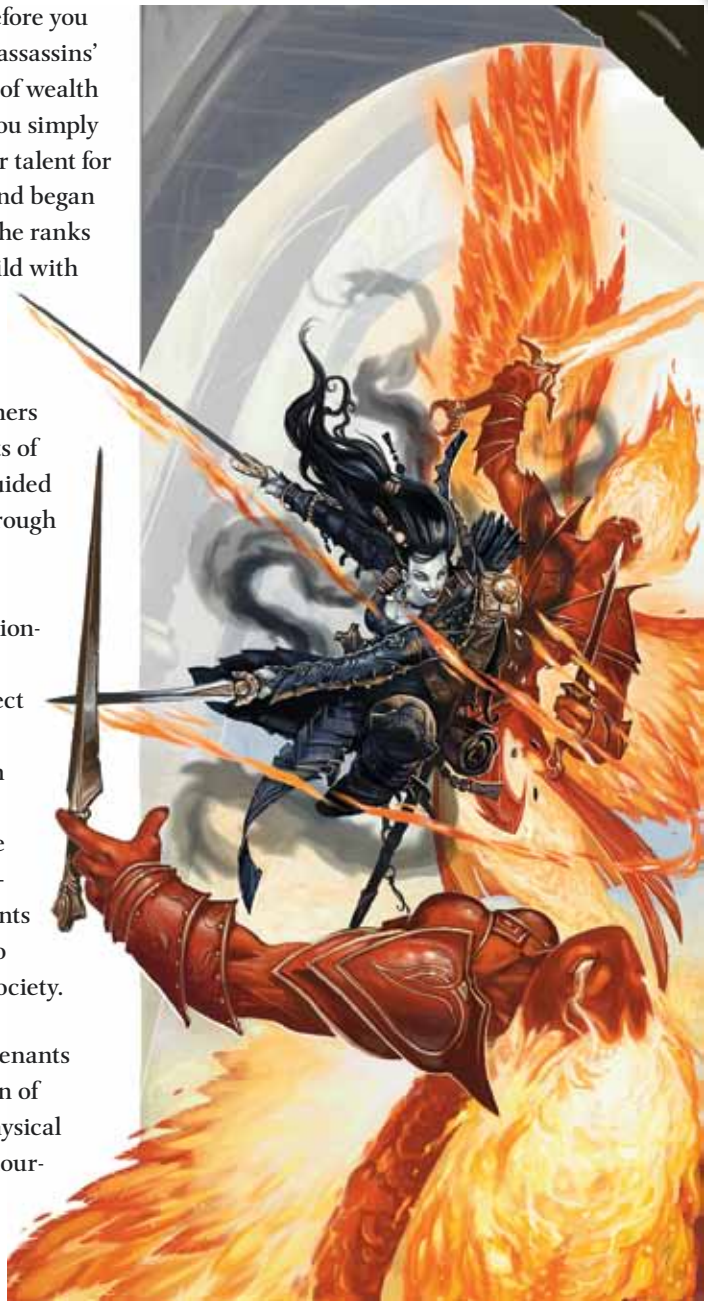
Drow Perhaps no race is better suited for the role of executioner than the drow. Not only do the drow's racial bonuses to Dexterity and Charisma match the executioner's ability score preferences, the race's *cloud of darkness* power is extremely useful in sowing confusion, providing cover, and warding off interference. Additionally, the drow racial bonuses to Intimidate and Stealth can provide the executioner with the ability to bully people out of his or her way or to avoid them entirely.

As a drow assassin, you can let your experience in the Underdark guide the way in which you perform your duties. You might prefer to stick to the shadows, leaving public assassinations to others. You might work only at night, giving you an advantage over the surface-dwelling races that are all but blinded by the darkness. Furthermore, you probably have some experience in the cutthroat world of drow politics, so you might tend to seek out targets who have significant political strength or whose death could serve as the trigger for a significant shift in political power.

Drow assassins often worship the Raven Queen, the god of fate and death. Executioners directly serve the Raven Queen every time they perform an assassination by sending another soul into her domain. Many even believe that they are the Raven Queen's weapons in the world and that she moves them around like playing pieces on a game board. Other drow executioners worship Sehanine for her connection to the moon and night, the time when executioners flourish.

Human Human executioners are among the most common assassins in existence, both because of the sheer number of humans in the world as well as the versatility that humans display (a trait executioners need in order to succeed and survive). Use the race's ability score bonus to boost Dexterity. The extra skill is useful for expanding the scope of your talents; training in Bluff might get you past gate guards, or Thievery might disable traps on the magistrate's windows.

When you play a human executioner, consider how your race's penchant for versatility and ambition played into your decision to become an assassin. Perhaps you were recruited at a young age, an orphan snatched off the street by a guild of assassins and given training in a wide variety of weapons and assassination techniques. Alternatively, you might have been a simple thug who dabbled in shadow magic or the use of poisons before you were wooed into an assassins' guild with promises of wealth and power. Maybe you simply saw a way to put your talent for killing to good use and began advancing through the ranks of your assassins' guild with your eyes set on the position of Grandfather Assassin.



Human executioners are usually adherents of the Raven Queen, guided to do her bidding through the touch of shadow magic they possess. Some human executioners worship Erathis, particularly her aspect of civilization; these rare individuals turn their weapons on any that threaten the strength of a civilization, such as insurgents and rebels who try to break the bonds of society.

Revenant Revenants have the combination of implacability and physical prowess needed to flourish as executioners. To accomplish whatever task

returned the revenant to life, the skills and powers of an executioner might be just the edge required to get the job done. The touch of shadow already inherent within the revenant's returned form blends and combines perfectly with the shadow magic employed by the executioner.

Revenants most often follow the Raven Queen, because the Lady of Fate is often the source of their return to the natural world. Whether willingly or unwillingly, a revenant must complete the tasks set before him or her by the Raven Queen, for the goals of death cannot be long denied.

Ability Scores

Determine your ability scores, remembering that an executioner is best served by a superior Dexterity score. You use Dexterity to make your weapon attacks; a steady hand and quick reflexes help you exploit an enemy's weaknesses. Because you rely on stealth to evade guards and other obstacles, you also need a good Dexterity to boost your Armor Class and skill checks.

Charisma helps you deceive and distract your foes, so you also want to have a high score in this ability. The Bluff and Streetwise skills in particular can be crucial when you must throw an enemy off your trail.

You increase two ability scores of your choice by 1 each when you reach certain levels: 4th, 8th, 14th, 18th, 24th, and 28th. In addition, all your ability scores increase by 1 at 11th and 21st levels.

Your other ability scores can help shape your character's background and interests. If you have a solid Strength score, you are likely the kind of assassin who leaps from rooftop to rooftop, clambers over walls, and uses physical ability to get close to your foes. If you have a good Wisdom score, you might instead be a more thoughtful and studious executioner, one who likes to spend hours and days studying a target before striking with lethal precision.

Skills

At 1st level, you have training in Stealth. In addition, you choose four more trained skills from the following list of class skills: Acrobatics, Arcana, Athletics, Bluff, Endurance, Insight, Intimidate, Perception, Streetwise, and Thievery.

For an executioner, each skill represents a tool that can be used when the time is right. Executioners have many different skill needs, depending on the situation. Sometimes they need to be secretive and silent, while at other times they need to be cunning and street smart. It benefits an executioner to have a wide range of skills so that any situation can be dealt with swiftly without disrupting the plan.

Your skills help describe your preferred assassination methods. An executioner who has training in Acrobatics and Athletics might have spent his formative years dashing across rooftops and might now specialize in second-story intrusions and assassinations in a target's lair. Alternatively, an executioner with training in Bluff and Streetwise might be a master of blending in. Such assassins spend years learning the mannerisms and habits of a variety of different cultures so that they can range far and wide in the pursuit of a target.

Class Features and Powers

Note which class features and powers you gain at 1st level, as specified on the Executioner Heroic Tier table on page 6.

For your guild attacks, decide whether you want to fight with melee or ranged weapons. If you want to fight close up and personal, choose Red Scales and the powers associated with that guild. If you want to attack from a distance, select League of Whispers and the powers connected to that guild. You also have a choice of two types of poison that you are familiar with.

Feats

Choose one feat at 1st level. You gain an additional feat at every even-numbered level, plus a feat at 11th and 21st levels.

Feats from the quick reaction category are a good choice for reflecting the executioner's ability to react and move quickly in any unexpected situation. Similarly, feats from the weapon training category can give the assassin an edge in combat. Assassins prefer melee weapons and those that can be easily used at close range, where they are most effective. Because executioners can use shields, consider taking the expertise feat that applies to a one-handed weapon, such as a dagger (light blades). The Master at Arms feat is also a great choice if you plan to use multiple weapons.

Additionally, many executioners spend a great deal of time studying and practicing their abilities. Consider taking feats from the learning and lore category, particularly those that enhance Athletics, Bluff, and Stealth, all of which can be extremely useful to executioners.

Equipment

You have proficiency with the following types of armor: cloth and leather. You can also use light shields. You have proficiency with the following weapons and weapon types: simple one-handed melee, military one-handed melee, garrote, simple ranged, blowgun, bola, shortbow.

You have 100 gp to buy your starting equipment. Begin by purchasing a poisoner's kit, which you will need to create the poisons you use. Next, buy a suit of leather armor, a light shield, and a one-handed weapon. A dagger is a good choice for a melee weapon because it is small, easy to conceal, and lightweight. A spear is also a good choice for an executioner who does not need to hide his weapon, since its larger damage die will make you a bit more dangerous. Likewise, be sure to purchase the weapons associated with your guild attacks.

You also want a ki focus, an item through which you channel shadow magic. Once you have a magic ki focus, you will be able to confer its enhancement bonus to your arsenal of weapons.

ASSASSIN TOOLS

All assassins have certain tools of their trade that they specialize in. Described below are three weapons and a new item of gear for use with the executioner.

Blowgun: This long, tubular weapon is used by blowing on one end. It can launch darts and other agents.

Bola: Consisting of two or three weighted spheres connected by cord, bolas tangle up opponents, but the spheres are also strong enough to inflict injuries.

Garrote: This strangling tool is a length of wire or knotted rope with handles at either end.

Poisoner's Kit: A poisoner's kit is an essential part of the assassin's repertoire. It contains the base components and tools needed to craft poisons. Cost 10 gp; weight 1 lb.

SUPERIOR MELEE WEAPONS

Two-Handed

Weapon	Prof.	Damage	Range	Price	Weight	Prop.	Group
Garrote*	+3	1d4	—	1 gp	1 lb.	HC, S	Garrote

***The only attacks that you can make with a garrote are ones that require or allow its use. Also, if you are holding a garrote in both hands, you can use the grab action even without a hand free. If the grab hits, the target takes 1[W] damage from the garrote.**

SUPERIOR RANGED WEAPONS

One-Handed

Weapon	Prof.	Damage	Range	Price	Weight	Prop.	Group
Bola	+3	1d4	4/8	5 gp	2 lb.	LT	Flail

Two-Handed

Weapon	Prof.	Damage	Range	Price	Weight	Prop.	Group
Blowgun	+3	1d4	5/10	5 gp	2 lb.	LM, S	Blowgun

Defenses and Hit Points

Calculate your defenses using your ability modifiers and the bonus for your character's armor and shield. In addition, you gain a +1 bonus to Fortitude and a +1 bonus to Will.

You start with hit points equal to 12 + your Constitution score. You gain 5 hit points each time you gain a level. You have a number of healing surges per day equal to 7 + your Constitution modifier.

Alignment and Final Details

At this point, you should have all the mechanical details of your character determined. There are a few more decisions to make.

Pick an alignment, which represents a basic outlook on the world that helps shape how your character acts. Do you execute only those who are perpetrating evil on the world? If so, lawful good or good is the best match for your character. If you perform executions only to serve your own needs and wants, then unaligned is a good choice.

Finally, check with your DM to see where you are from in the campaign setting, the people you already know, and what your current situation is. It also helps to spend a few minutes working out how or if you know the other players' characters.

Heroic Executioner

As your career begins, you work on the basic skills that allow you to evade notice and deliver killing strikes. Although you might begin by assassinating goblin chiefs and orc warlords, the abilities you develop in the heroic tier set the stage for far greater accomplishments.

EXECUTIONER HEROIC TIER

Total XP	Level	Feats Known	Class Features and Powers
0	1	1	Versatile Defense Attack Finesse Guild Attacks *Assassin's strike* Quick Swap Poison Use
1,000	2	+1	Utility power
2,250	3	—	Death Attack
3,750	4	+1	Ability score increase Nimble Drop
5,500	5	—	Improved Poison Use
7,500	6	+1	Utility power
10,000	7	—	*Hidden stab*
13,000	8	+1	Ability score increase Flawless Disguise
16,500	9	—	Improved Poison Use
20,500	10	+1	Utility power

Level 1: Versatile Defense

Ever watchful, an executioner practices techniques for staying alive. You have learned a mode of defense tailored to your fighting style.

Benefit: You choose a bonus feat, either Shield Proficiency: Light or Two-Weapon Defense. You don't have to meet the feat's prerequisite.

Level 1: Attack Finesse

For the executioner, speed, agility, and precision are more important than muscle. An executioner learns how to handle any weapon with a finesse that lends itself to more accurate strikes.

Benefit: You can use Dexterity instead of Strength for your melee basic attacks.

In addition, once per turn you can deal 1d8 extra damage with a weapon attack using a one-handed weapon, a garrote, a blowgun, or a shortbow. The extra damage increases to 2d8 at 11th level and 3d8 at 21st level.

Level 1: Guild Attacks

As a member of either the Red Scales or the League of Whispers, you have learned various deadly attack techniques. At the start of your career, you can use the techniques associated with your guild.

Red Scales

The Red Scales are considered by many to be the masters of close-quarters combat. The techniques that their guild members learn combine decades of study of both martial arts and common assassination techniques, giving them an edge when they are unarmed, wielding a dagger, or using a garrote.

Benefit: You gain the powers *garrote strangle, poisoned dagger,* and *quick lunge.*

Garrote Strangle

The garrote is a favorite weapon for silent executions. It gives the assassin a silent and efficient weapon for use on the unsuspecting. Though it is difficult to use a garrote on someone who is aware of its presence, assassins have been known to lie in wait for just the right moment when their target wanders too close, then reach out to strangle the target before he or she can react.

BASIC ATTACKS

As an assassin, you make most of your attacks using basic attacks. Your guild attacks and poisons are more situational, giving you a diverse array of tools in battle.

Garrote Strangle — Assassin Attack

You wait for the perfect moment when your foe is within reach, then strangle it with your garrote.

At-Will ✦ Martial, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Requirement: You must use this power with a garrote.
Effect: You shift up to 2 squares before the attack.
Target: One creature you are hidden from
Attack: Dexterity vs. Reflex
Hit: 2[W] + Dexterity modifier damage, and the target is grabbed until the end of your next turn. While the grab persists, the target takes a –2 penalty to attack rolls against you and cannot speak, and you cannot make other attacks.
Level 21: 4[W] + Dexterity modifier damage.
Sustain Standard: The grab persists, and the target takes 2[W] + your Dexterity modifier damage.
Level 21: 4[W] + Dexterity modifier damage.

Poisoned Dagger

The dagger's narrow blade excels at piercing armor and slipping through gaps in defenses, making it a good candidate for delivering poisons. Since only a slight nick is required to administer a poison, many assassins carry daggers for just this purpose, even when using some other weapon as their primary one.

Poisoned Dagger — Assassin Attack

Your piercing blade delivers poisons quickly and cleanly, making them difficult to shake off.

At-Will ✦ Martial, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Requirement: You must use this power with a dagger.
Target: One creature
Attack: Dexterity vs. AC
Hit: 1[W] + Dexterity modifier damage. If you deliver an assassin poison with this attack, the target takes a –4 penalty to its first saving throw, if any, against the poison's effect.
Level 21: 2[W] + Dexterity modifier damage.
Effect: If the dagger has an assassin poison on it that is normally delivered on a hit, you can deliver that poison to the target even if the attack misses.

Quick Lunge

You focus some of your training on the speed of your movements in combat. This particular attack technique allows you to lash out quickly at an enemy that believes itself to be out of your reach. You can not only attack a quarry that would normally be protected by an intervening bodyguard, but you can also upend a foe to prevent its retreat.

Quick Lunge — Assassin Attack

You lunge forward quickly, upending your foe with a kick and a thrust of your weapon.

At-Will ✦ Martial, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** 1
Effect: You shift 1 square before the attack.
Target: One creature
Attack: Dexterity vs. AC
Hit: 1[W] damage, and you knock the target prone. You can then shift 1 square back to your starting position.
Level 21: 2[W] damage.

League of Whispers

Members of the League of Whispers specialize in the use of a variety of ranged weapons. This training allows them to perform special tricks that can help them execute a target or escape the local authorities. League members undergo training with bolas, hand crossbows, and blowguns to give them an edge against enemies both near and far. Like other executioners, members of the League are trained in the use of multiple weapons and usually carry a variety of weapons with which they are skilled.

Benefit: You gain the powers *bola takedown*, *precision dart*, and *quick shot*.

Bola Takedown

The proper application of bolas can bring down even the most nimble of enemies. Executioners frequently use bolas to keep their targets from escaping, since most creatures tend to flee from their killers on sight. However, this particular technique, which uses a specialized throwing motion to ensure maximum extension of the weapon, is also sometimes used to trip up pursuit when fleeing from the scene of an execution.

Bola Takedown — Assassin Attack

You whirl your bola over your head and take careful aim before hurling it at a foe's legs.

At-Will ✦ Martial, Weapon
Standard Action **Ranged** weapon
Requirement: You must use this power with a bola.
Target: One creature
Attack: Dexterity vs. Reflex
Hit: 1[W] damage, and the target falls prone.
Level 21: 2[W] damage.

Precision Dart Though one of the weaker weapons in the executioner's repertoire, the blowgun is an excellent tool for ensuring that a poison is delivered directly to an opponent and not turned aside by armor that can deflect a dagger. This technique gives you pinpoint accuracy with the blowgun. A well-placed dart can even be lethal to weaker foes if it punctures a vital area.

Precision Dart — Assassin Attack

The poisoned dart flies from your blowgun with unerring accuracy.

At-Will ✦ Martial, Weapon
Standard Action **Ranged** weapon
Requirement: You must use this power with a blowgun.
Target: One creature
Attack: Dexterity vs. Reflex
Hit: 1[W] + Dexterity modifier damage. If you deliver an assassin poison with this attack, the target takes a –4 penalty to its first saving throw, if any, against the poison's effect.
Level 21: 2[W] + Dexterity modifier damage.
Effect: If the ammunition has an assassin poison on it that is normally delivered on a hit, you can deliver that poison to the target even if the attack misses.

Quick Shot The hand crossbow is one of the great equalizers when it comes to lethal ranged combat. Executioners often prefer to perform most of their assassinations up close, which can sometimes bring the assassin too close to other enemies. This particular quick-fire technique uses the hand crossbow to surprise and stagger nearby enemies long enough for the executioner to escape.

Quick Shot — Assassin Attack

You loose a quick bolt from your crossbow, thereby creating a momentary opening for your escape.

At-Will ✦ Martial, Weapon
Standard Action **Ranged** 1
Requirement: You must use this power with a hand crossbow.
Target: One creature
Attack: Dexterity vs. AC
Hit: 1[W] + Dexterity modifier damage.
Level 21: 2[W] + Dexterity modifier damage.
Effect: You shift up to 2 squares.
Special: Using this power doesn't provoke opportunity attacks.

Level 1: Assassin's Strike

The heart of the executioner's ability to take down a foe is the *assassin's strike* technique. An executioner often has only one chance to eliminate an enemy. Once the element of surprise is lost, bodyguards (or even targets themselves, if capable) can interfere with the mission, leaving the target regretfully alive. This powerful technique represents the intersection of the assassin's knowledge of vital areas of the body, extreme mastery of weapons, and ability to throw everything he has into a single formidable attack. The executioner must wait for the exact right moment to strike, but when he does, this attack can slay a target instantly.

Benefit: You gain the *assassin's strike* power.

Assassin's Strike — Assassin Attack

You strike with precision at the exact right moment, landing an attack that can be instantly fatal.

Encounter ✦ Martial
No Action **Personal**
Trigger: You hit a creature within 5 squares of you with an attack using a weapon.
Target: The creature you hit
Effect: The target takes 1d10 extra damage from the triggering attack. If the target is helpless, this damage is maximized.
Level 3: 2d10 extra damage.
Level 7: 3d10 extra damage.
Level 13: 4d10 extra damage.
Level 17: 5d10 extra damage.
Level 23: 6d10 extra damage.
Level 27: 7d10 extra damage.
Special: Nothing but a short or an extended rest can allow you to regain the use of this power.

Level 1: Quick Swap

Your weapons are extensions of your body. When you are changing your focus from nearby foes to distant enemies, you can switch between your melee and ranged weapons with ease.

Benefit: Once during each of your turns, you can take a free action to draw or stow a weapon and then draw another weapon.

Level 1: Poison Use

Executioners have a long history with poison. All become masters at mixing their own poisons. For most assassins, poison is only one of their many weapons. Most of the poisons used by executioners are merely the set-up for a later attack, a precursor to ensure that the target won't be able to stop the executioner once the assassination attempt begins in earnest.

Many poisons are outlawed in civilized realms, so executioners learn to craft simple, unstable venoms that quickly break down into inert components. In this manner, an assassin can travel with a seemingly innocent array of materials. When it is time to strike, the executioner quickly crafts a poison as needed. Because the poison is unstable, it decays rapidly and leaves no incriminating evidence if unused. A shrewd executioner can maintain an innocent facade even in the face of a thorough search of his or her person and quarters.

Benefit: You learn the recipes for two 1st-level assassin poisons of your choice. During an extended rest, you can prepare one vial of a 1st-level assassin poison.

You must know the poison's recipe and have a poisoner's kit. The vial contains a single use of the poison, which expires if it isn't used before the start of your next extended rest. An item can benefit from the effects of only one assassin poison at a time.

Only you can use your assassin poisons, and you are immune to the effects of the ones you create.

Bloodroot Poison

The poison created from the oil of the bloodroot plant causes a temporary fever and weakening of the body. Bloodroot (named for the deep crimson color of the root) is a relatively common plant often mistaken for other, harmless plants that grow nearby. The poison is favored by assassins who seek to knock an enemy off balance and disorient it before the lethal strike.

Bloodroot Poison Level 1

This crimson liquid causes fever and disorientation.

Assassin Poison

Power (Consumable ✦ Poison): Minor Action. You apply the poison to your melee weapon or one piece of your ammunition. During this encounter, the next creature you hit with a weapon attack using the poisoned item takes 6 extra poison damage, and it is dazed (save ends).

Power (Consumable ✦ Poison): Minor Action. You pour the poison into a drink or onto a plate of food. The first creature to consume the food or drink within the next hour is dazed until the end of its next extended rest.

Carrion Crawler Brain Juice

Carrion crawler brain juice is exactly what its name claims: a poison derived from the brains of vicious carrion crawlers, which makes it a difficult substance to harvest. Carrion crawler brain juice makes the body of the target sluggish as the poison attacks muscles and essential tissues that help the body move. Longer exposure to brain juice causes a form of paralysis that makes it impossible for the victim to move a significant distance.

Carrion Crawler Brain Juice Level 1

Purple, oily carrion crawler brain juice can cause sluggishness and paralysis.

Assassin Poison

Power (Consumable ✦ Poison): Minor Action. You apply the poison to your melee weapon or five pieces of your ammunition. Until the end of the encounter, whenever you hit a creature with a weapon attack using the poisoned item, the target takes 4 extra poison damage, and it is slowed until the end of your next turn.

Power (Consumable ✦ Poison): Minor Action. You apply the poison to a single handheld object. Within the next hour, the first creature other than you to hold or wear the object for more than 1 minute is immobilized until the end of its next extended rest.

Greenblood Oil

Named for its color and thickness, greenblood oil is a viscous poison derived from poisonous plants that grow deep in primeval forests. This combination of oils from several different sources has medicinal uses: It breaks up dangerous blood clots and can be used to help drain infections from the body. Assassins, however, use greenblood oil to make it more difficult for the body to heal. This poison is often used to make a target more vulnerable to harm rather than by harming directly. For example, an assassin might pour greenblood oil over a target's food early in the day before performing a very public assassination, to ensure that the victim cannot be magically healed once the attack takes place.

Greenblood Oil Level 1

This thick, green oil has the consistency of blood and makes enemies more susceptible to grievous injuries.

Assassin Poison

Power (Consumable ✦ Poison): Minor Action. You apply the poison to your melee weapon or one piece of your ammunition. During this encounter, the next enemy you hit with a weapon attack using the poisoned item takes 10 extra poison damage, and it cannot regain hit points (save ends).

Power (Consumable ✦ Poison): Minor Action. You pour the poison into a drink or onto a plate of food. The first creature to consume the food or drink within the next hour takes a -4 penalty to saving throws and cannot regain hit points until the end of its next extended rest.

Id Moss Powder

Id moss grows primarily in caves and crevasses in the earth, particularly in places where the sun never reaches. Most forest-dwelling people know to avoid consuming id moss even in desperate situations, because the moss causes mental trauma and eventually insanity. When crushed into a fine powder, id moss powder can be inhaled, allowing it to attack the mind more quickly.

Id Moss Powder Level 1

This green powder causes mental anguish and eventually insanity.

Assassin Poison

Power (Consumable ✦ Implement, Poison, Psychic): Standard Action. *Effect:* You make the following attack.

Ranged 5

Target: One creature

Attack: Dexterity vs. Reflex

Hit: 2d10 + Dexterity modifier poison damage, and ongoing 5 psychic damage (save ends).

Each Failed Saving Throw: The target makes a basic attack as a free action against its nearest ally.

Miss: Half damage, and ongoing 5 psychic damage (save ends).

Special: If the DM allows it, a creature reduced to 0 hit points by this poison is not killed, but is instead driven permanently insane.

Power (Consumable): Standard Action. You place the poison in a closed container, such as a chest or a jewelry box. Make the attack above against the first creature to open the container within the next hour.

Nitharit Poison

One of the few slow-acting poisons in the assassin's repertoire, nitharit poison gradually breaks down a creature's natural defenses against toxins and eventually turns those defenses against the poisoned creature. Nitharit poison is often used as a precursor to weaken a target before a second poisoning assault. For example, an assassin might put nitharit poison in a magistrate's wine, then later in the evening return to finish the job with a stronger poison once the target's body is in no shape to fight it off.

Nitharit Poison Level 1

This clear, odorless, tasteless liquid slowly turns a creature's natural defenses against poison into a harmful weapon.

Assassin Poison

Power (Consumable ✦ Poison): Minor Action. You apply the poison to your melee weapon or five pieces of your ammunition. Until the end of the encounter, when you hit a creature with a weapon attack using the poisoned item, the creature takes ongoing 2 poison damage (save ends).

First Failed Saving Throw: The creature instead takes ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

Power (Consumable ✦ Poison): Minor Action. You apply the poison to a handheld object. Within the next hour, the first creature other than you to hold or wear the object for more than 1 minute gains vulnerable 5 poison and loses all poison immunity and resistance until the end of its next extended rest.

SPECIAL POISONS

Several of the poisons described here have special effects that begin with "If the DM allows it, a creature reduced to 0 hit points by this poison is not killed, but . . ."

These are discretionary effects in that they call for some interpretation by the players and the DM. For example, id moss powder causes permanent insanity. We don't define what that means; it's up to you. You might decide that the target's Intelligence and Wisdom scores drop to 1 with no hope of recovery, or that it regains its former mental capacity but is forever twisted in some psychotic way. Likewise, the extent of the visible scarring caused by ungol dust is open to interpretation. Do the scars cover the victim's whole body or only its face? Do they affect Charisma?

All of this assumes, of course, that the assassin leaves the target alive at 0 hit points rather than just finishing it off.

If these poisons are ever used against fellow player characters, the DM should consider allowing the "permanent" effects to be removed through quests, long-lost rituals, or some other adventurous process.

Ungol Dust

Ungol dust is a black powder made of the crushed remains of dried-up spiders and scorpions that is so fine that one errant breath can blow away an entire dose. Most of those who craft this poison wear masks to ensure that they do not accidentally disperse—or inhale—the dust before packing it into small, easily shattered pellets. When ungol dust comes into contact with flesh or other living material, it becomes highly corrosive.

Ungol Dust Level 1

This black powder dissolves organic material.

Assassin Poison

Power (Consumable ✦ Acid, Implement, Poison): Standard Action. *Effect:* You make the following attack.

Ranged 5

Target: One creature

Attack: Dexterity vs. Reflex

Hit: 3d8 + Dexterity modifier poison damage, and ongoing 5 acid damage (save ends).

Miss: Half damage, and ongoing 5 acid damage (save ends).

Special: If the DM allows it, a creature reduced to 0 hit points by this poison is not killed, but is instead knocked unconscious until the end of the encounter, and it is permanently and visibly scarred.

Power (Consumable): Standard Action. You place the ungol dust in a closed container, such as a chest or a jewelry box. Make the attack above against the first creature to open the container within the next hour.

Level 2: Utility Power

Part of being an assassin is knowing which tool to use in any situation. Some executioners master the power of shadow magic early to gain a supernatural edge over their targets. Others simply refine their natural skills, pushing themselves to peak performance.

Benefit: You gain a 2nd-level assassin utility power of your choice.

Distracting Illusion

Mastering the ability to weave shadow magic to create illusions can be a useful skill for the assassin who wants to focus on subterfuge and misdirection. The images created by *distracting illusion* won't fool anyone who examines them closely or interacts with them. Instead, these illusions are meant to cover up the assassin's actions. For example, an assassin might create an illusion of the guard that the assassin just killed, standing at his assigned post, in order to fool observers into thinking the guard is still on duty. Alternatively, an assassin might lure his or her quarry out into the open by creating an illusion of a trusted companion beckoning the target urgently to where the assassin lurks in the shadows.

Distracting Illusion Assassin Utility 2

The image of a creature flickers and then solidifies as you craft an illusion meant to cover your dark deeds.

Encounter ✦ Illusion, Shadow
Minor Action **Close** burst 10

Effect: You create the illusion of a Medium creature of your choice in an unoccupied square in the burst. The illusion is silent but moves and acts as though it was the creature it appears to be. Creatures that closely examine the illusion can make an Insight check to discover the illusion for what it really is. The check is opposed by a Bluff check that you make when you create the illusion. The illusion lasts until the end of your next turn.

Sustain Minor: The illusion persists until the end of your next turn, and you can move it up to 6 squares.

Silent Stalker

You have learned to quiet your steps and keep your equipment from making noise. As soon as your enemies turn their backs on you, you can approach quickly and quietly, using your enemy's body to shield yourself from sight.

Silent Stalker Assassin Utility 2

You pad quietly toward your victim, unseen and unheard.

At-Will ✦ Martial
Move Action **Personal**

Requirement: You must be hidden.

Effect: You move up to your speed to a square within 2 squares of an enemy. You remain hidden until the end of this turn or until you make an attack.

Summon the Mists

Summon the mists is a simple power that provides rudimentary cover against observation. It allows you to call up a bank of fog that rolls out from the shadows to conceal your actions. When used properly, it usually draws little attention from observers because the fog appears to be perfectly natural even as it conceals dark deeds.

Summon the Mists Assassin Utility 2

A thick fog rises around you.

Daily ✦ Shadow, Zone
Minor Action **Close** burst 5

Effect: The burst creates a zone of lightly obscured squares that lasts until the end of the encounter.

Level 3: Death Attack

Executioners know how to ensure that the job gets done. You rarely leave your enemies on the brink of death and know how to drive your weapon just a little deeper to turn a grave wound into a killing blow.

Benefit: When you hit an enemy with a melee or a ranged attack that deals damage, you can choose to reduce the enemy to 0 hit points automatically if it has 10 hit points or fewer after the damage is dealt.

Level 4: Ability Score Increase

Shadow is becoming so ingrained within you that it infuses your essential nature and makes you more than you were before.

Benefit: You increase two ability scores of your choice by 1.

Level 4: Nimble Drop

Whether high on the rooftops or lurking along the edge of a cliff, you often find yourself using hiding places that are perched upon great heights. You know how to soften a fall so that you can leap into action from your lofty lair.

Benefit: When you take falling damage, you can take a free action to reduce the damage by 6 + your level. If this reduces the damage to 0, you don't fall prone.

Level 5: Improved Poison Use

Your confidence in your skills as a maker of poisons grows, as does your speed in doing so. Even when handling deadly toxins, your hand remains steady, and your eye for mixtures gives you the ability to accomplish more in a short time.

Benefit: You learn the recipe for another 1st-level assassin poison of your choice. During an extended rest, you can now prepare two vials of 1st-level assassin poison.

Level 6: Utility Power

You have learned to master a more advanced assassination technique, ranging from improved skill in shadow magic to practical experience in staying out of sight.

Benefit: You gain a new assassin utility power of your level or lower.

Ghost of the Rooftops

Streets and alleyways are filled with city guards and other witnesses, so some executioners learn the art of dancing from roof to roof with speed and precision. For such a character, clearing the distance between buildings or scaling a palace wall is like taking a stroll around the corner.

Ghost of the Rooftops — **Assassin Utility 6**

Your skill at climbing and leaping allows you to move across the rooftops unhindered.

At-Will (Special) ✦ Martial
Move Action **Personal**
Effect: You climb or make a long jump, moving a number of squares up to your speed, without making an Athletics check.
Special: You can use this power only once per round.

Darkness

Not every execution can be performed with only your victim present. Bodyguards, servants, and innocent bystanders sometimes interfere with assassinations. *Darkness* allows you to sow confusion by creating an area of pure, magical darkness that no light can penetrate. Those in the area of its effect cannot see you performing your lethal task. Some executioners also use this power to conceal their hiding places from outside observers; a well-placed *darkness* effect can block the light of lamps and candles, making a room in an inn appear dark to observers who might be hunting the assassin just outside the window.

Darkness — **Assassin Utility 6**

A cloud of pure shadow expands from you, shrouding the area in darkness.

Daily ✦ Shadow, Zone
Minor Action **Close** burst 2
Effect: The burst creates a zone that lasts until the end of your next turn. To creatures other than you, the zone is totally obscured and blocks line of sight.
Sustain Minor: The zone persists until the end of your next turn. You must be in the zone to sustain it.

Vanish

A quick escape is one of the most valued tools in your repertoire. This power ensures that you can disappear without a trace, at least long enough to retreat without being pursued. It envelops you in a cloak of invisibility, then teleports you a short distance to make sure that your enemies are completely confounded.

Vanish — Assassin Utility 6

Without warning you disappear from the sight of all around you. By the time you reappear, you are far from where you once stood.

Encounter ✦ Shadow, Teleportation
Immediate Reaction **Personal**
Trigger: You are hit by an attack.
Effect: You become invisible until the start of your next turn, and you teleport up to your speed.

Level 7: Hidden Stab

An assassin's target is not often easy prey. Assassins are usually tasked with taking down enemies that have powerful spells, years of training, and extensive experience in avoiding assassination attempts. However, the most skilled assassins are those who can land their devastating strikes on these powerful enemies, and most successful assassins use this technique to catch a well-defended enemy off guard and then land a killing blow.

Benefit: You gain the *hidden stab* power.

Hidden Stab — Assassin Attack

With a quick grab from behind, you cause your enemy to lower its defenses, allowing you to land a deadly blow even as they struggle to break free.

At-Will ✦ Martial, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** 1
Requirement: You must have a hand free and use this power with a light blade.
Target: One creature
Attack: Dexterity vs. AC
Hit: 1[W] damage, and the target is grabbed until the end of your next turn. While the grab persists, the target grants combat advantage, and it takes a –2 penalty to its first escape attempt. If you make a melee weapon attack against the target before the grab ends and your *assassin's strike* is not expended, you can use that power against the target even if the attack misses.
Level 21: 2[W] damage.
Sustain Minor: The grab persists until the end of your next turn.

Level 8: Ability Score Increase

You are long accustomed now to the darkness within you, and your body and mind become more formidable.

Benefit: You increase two ability scores of your choice by 1.

Level 8: Flawless Disguise

Deception is a key part of the executioner's ability to reach his or her targets without impediment. Because infiltration is often necessary for gaining access to a target, executioners learn to disguise themselves well enough to blend in with their surroundings. You might pass yourself off as a servant to infiltrate the local lord's manor or appear as a merchant's cook to get into his dining chambers.

Benefit: During a short rest, you can craft an excellent disguise that makes you appear to be another humanoid of your size (either a specific person or a nondescript member of a race or an organization). Any creature that attempts to see through your ruse makes an Insight check opposed by your Bluff check, with a +5 bonus to your check. You must use a disguise kit to create the disguise.

Level 9: Improved Poison Use

The longer you work with your poisons, the more you learn about them. Whether you pick up the knowledge from a fellow assassin, pay a local apothecary for new instruction, or simply learn of new poisons by trial and error, your repertoire of poisons continues to grow.

Benefit: You learn the recipe for another 1st-level assassin poison of your choice. During an extended rest, you can now prepare three vials of 1st-level assassin poison.

Level 10: Utility Power

At the peak of your power in the heroic tier, your mastery of shadow magic gives you access to a variety of tools that you can use to perform your executions without being obstructed or captured.

Benefit: You gain a new assassin utility power of your level or lower.

Death Mark

Executioners often mark their targets in some way before the assassination occurs. This power creates a singed, black sigil somewhere on the target's body that pulses with shadow magic. This mark creates a bond between the executioner and the target that gives the executioner the ability to detect the target with unerring accuracy. Once a *death mark* is placed, the assassin is rarely far behind.

Death Mark — Assassin Utility 10

A black mark appears on the target's form, appearing to be burned in with a hot iron. It warns of impending death.

Daily ✦ Shadow
Minor Action **Close** burst 5
Target: One creature in the burst
Effect: Until the end of your next extended rest, you always know the direction and approximate distance to the target. In addition, the target cannot become invisible to you.

Eyes Unseen

A useful power that has saved the lives of many an executioner, *eyes unseen* allows the user to peer through walls, around corners, and even through ceilings and floors to see what lies ahead. It creates a small, invisible sensor crafted by shadow magic that can appear within a small radius and pass visions back to the assassin. Many executioners use *eyes unseen* to search for guards, keep an eye on pursuers, or reveal traps and ambushes before walking into them.

Eyes Unseen — Assassin Utility 10

You conjure a sensor of shadow that appears nearby and allows you to see through walls and other barriers.

Encounter ✦ Shadow
Minor Action **Personal**
Effect: Choose a square within 5 squares of you, even a square on the other side of blocking terrain. Until the end of your next turn, you can see and hear from that square, as well as from your own.

Walk Through Shadow

When you use *walk through shadow*, you create a brief, flickering shadow that whisks you quickly from one place to another. Unlike some other teleportation abilities, *walk through shadow* can take the user into unknown places and allows him or her to bypass walls, doors, and other barriers with a blind jump.

Walk Through Shadow — Assassin Utility 10

A swirling mass of shadow surrounds you before transporting you instantaneously a short distance.

Encounter ✦ Shadow, Teleportation
Move Action **Personal**
Effect: You teleport up to 5 squares. You do not need line of sight to the destination space. If you try to teleport into a space that you cannot occupy, the teleportation is negated.

Paragon Executioner

Executioners who reach the paragon tier have proven themselves more than capable of carrying out assassinations (both clandestine and public) without being caught or killed themselves. For you, simple political assassinations and hired killings begin to lose their luster, because city watchmen or the bodyguards of local merchants rarely challenge your skills. Your abilities are better utilized stalking more powerful quarry—those that threaten the entire world, if not the planes themselves.

Paragon Path: Guild Executioner

At 11th level, your executioner takes on a paragon path, typically the guild executioner paragon path. As a member of a powerful guild, you are afforded training and education in the killing arts that surpasses the prowess of most who work alone. You learn secret fighting techniques, gain access to experts in the field of poison use, and rise through the ranks of your guild as your skills progress. Perhaps one day you will even challenge the Grandfather of Assassins for control of the guild.

Prerequisite: Only an executioner can take this paragon path.

EXECUTIONER PARAGON TIER

Total XP	Level	Feats Known	Class Features and Powers
26,000	11	+1	Ability score increase Blindside [guild executioner] Devastating Assassination [guild executioner] Executioner's Action [guild executioner]
32,000	12	+1	***Daring escape*** [guild executioner]
39,000	13	—	Improved Death Attack
47,000	14	+1	Ability score increase
57,000	15	—	Improved Poison Use
69,000	16	+1	Vital Strike [guild executioner] ***Untraceable step***
83,000	17	—	***Shadow coffin***
99,000	18	+1	Ability score increase
119,000	19	—	Improved Poison Use
143,000	20	+1	Poisoner's Secrets [guild executioner]

Level 11: Ability Score Increase

As if to prepare you for the paragon tier, your body and mind gird themselves against future threats by making you more formidable in every way.

Benefit: Each of your ability scores increases by 1.

Level 11: Blindside

Guild executioner paragon path feature

A key trait taught to you by your guild is how to take advantage of the ignorance of your enemies. While hidden, you can remain so still that, when your strike comes, your enemies have no time to react or to defend themselves. Though truly blindsiding your enemies is difficult (requiring them to move within striking distance of you without seeing you), good luck and a good hiding place can often make your assassinations easier than ever.

Benefit: If you are hidden from your enemies at the start of an encounter, you gain a +4 bonus to your first attack roll during the encounter.

Level 11: Devastating Assassination

Guild executioner paragon path feature

Your guild has taught you its secret techniques for executions. These secrets may be as simple as the angle of a blade or as complex as a long period of preparation before the execution takes place. Regardless of the actual form it takes, this knowledge increases the potency of your deadliest attack.

Benefit: When you use *assassin's strike*, increase the extra damage it deals by 2d10.

Level 11: Executioner's Action

Guild executioner paragon path feature

For you, the span of time when your killing blow streaks toward your enemy's body seems to slow to a crawl. That crucial instant passes in the blink of an eye for your enemies and allies, but you perceive each fraction of it in full clarity that lets you guide your strike to where it will do the most harm.

Benefit: When you spend an action point to make an attack and you roll a 1, 2, or 3 on any damage die associated with that attack (including extra damage from *assassin's strike* or critical hit dice), that die instead deals 4 damage.

Level 12: Daring Escape

Guild executioner paragon path feature

When the kill is made, you need to be prepared to bolt away at a moment's notice. Your guildmasters taught you a special slaying technique that uses the momentum of your last, deadly strike to propel yourself away. Before your enemies even know that their ally is dead, you are already speeding out of sight.

Benefit: You gain the *daring escape* power.

Daring Escape — Guild Executioner Utility 12

You transfer the momentum of a killing blow into a rapid dash that leaves remaining enemies far behind.

Encounter ✦ Martial
Free Action **Personal**
Trigger: You reduce an enemy to 0 hit points.
Effect: You shift up to twice your speed. You gain a +5 power bonus to Athletics checks made to climb and jump during the shift.

Level 13: Improved Death Attack

Death comes swiftly to the wounded, and even more swiftly when you are involved. Your ability to end the life of a wounded enemy grows to the point that even those who don't yet feel truly endangered can fall to your attack.

Benefit: When you hit an enemy with a melee or a ranged attack that deals damage, you can choose to reduce the enemy to 0 hit points automatically if it has 20 hit points or fewer after the damage is dealt.

Level 14: Ability Score Increase

Your continued cultivation of the dark forces within you enhances your physical and mental resilience.

Benefit: You increase two ability scores of your choice by 1.

Level 15: Improved Poison Use

As you gain greater experience in the wider world, you also come across rare substances that can enhance the effectiveness of your poisons. Through study and experimentation, you learn to create dangerous toxins that draw their potency from exotic creatures and plants.

Benefit: You learn the recipe for a 15th-level assassin poison of your choice. When you prepare vials of assassin poison during an extended rest, one of them can be up to 15th level.

Black Lotus Extract

This powder is derived from the legendary black lotus flower. The effect is devastating when this substance comes in contact with a creature for more than a few seconds. Black lotuses bloom only once every three years, and it is during that time that the flowers can be harvested to produce this toxic oil. Black lotuses grow only in deep swamps, along shadowed riverbanks, and at the edges of caves where they are sheltered from direct light.

Black Lotus Extract — Level 15

This thick oil is dark blue, though it becomes invisible when applied to a weapon or object.

Assassin Poison

Power (Consumable ✦ Poison): Minor Action. You apply the poison to your melee weapon or five pieces of your ammunition. Until the end of the encounter, when you hit a creature with a weapon attack using the poisoned item, the creature takes 8 extra poison damage.

Power (Consumable ✦ Poison): Minor Action. You apply the poison to a handheld object. Within the next hour, the next creature other than you to hold or wear the object for more than 1 minute takes 40 poison damage.

Insanity Mist

Another poison designed to affect the mind as much as the body, insanity mist is a liquid that is only potent when made airborne and then inhaled. A liquid is distilled from the brains of mind flayer thralls (or mind flayers themselves, which produce a much higher quantity of poison) and combined with several kinds of mold spores to deliver the poison straight to the brain. Insanity mist begins eroding the consciousness of the victim almost instantly.

Insanity Mist — Level 15

This deep purple liquid swirls with milky colors that sometimes seem to resolve into disturbing images.

Assassin Poison

Power (Consumable ✦ Implement, Poison, Psychic): Standard Action. *Effect:* Make the following attack:

Ranged 5

Target: One creature

Attack: Dexterity vs. Fortitude

Hit: 3d10 + Dexterity modifier poison damage, and ongoing 10 psychic damage (save ends).
First Failed Saving Throw: The ongoing damage increases to 15.

Miss: Half damage, and ongoing 5 psychic damage (save ends).

Special: If the DM allows it, a creature reduced to 0 hit points by this poison is not killed, but is instead driven permanently insane.

Power (Consumable ✦ Poison): Standard Action. You place the insanity mist in a closed container, such as a chest or a jewelry box. Make the attack above against the first creature to open the container within the next hour.

Lich Dust

To those uneducated in the art of poison crafting, lich dust is often believed to be a powder made from the ground-up bones of liches. This belief is only partially correct; in truth, lich dust is made from a combination of pulverized bones taken from a variety of undead creatures (liches among them) mixed with other alchemical and natural substances. Lich dust retains some of the necromantic power that once animated the bones it is made from, which can drain the energy and spirit of creatures that consume it or are injured by a weapon coated with the poison.

Lich Dust — Level 15

This white powder looks to be the residue of ground-up bones.

Assassin Poison

Power (Consumable ✦ Poison): Minor Action. You apply the poison to your melee weapon or one piece of your ammunition. During this encounter, the next creature you hit with a weapon attack using the poisoned item takes 10 extra poison damage, and it is weakened (save ends).

Power (Consumable ✦ Poison): Minor Action. You pour the poison into a drink or onto a plate of food. Within the next hour, the first creature to consume the food or drink is weakened until the end of its next extended rest.

Level 16: Vital Strike

Guild executioner paragon path feature

In your pursuit of a greater ability to execute your targets quickly and efficiently, one of your fields of study is the anatomies of various types of creatures. You have found about more than just the natural races—you've learned where to strike demons to inflict the most damage, where the weak points of angels can be found, and where an archon's armor leaves tiny but dangerous gaps.

Benefit: Your at-will weapon attack powers deal half damage on a miss.

Level 16: Untraceable Step

When you use *untraceable step*, you use the power of shadow magic to create a veil around yourself that hides you from the sight of others. This veil is short-lived, but it does not waver even when you engage in strenuous activity. Many assassins use this power as a means of both infiltration and escape, either slipping past the eyes of guards on the way to an assassination or vanishing from sight long enough to get free of the chaos that follows a killing.

Benefit: You gain the *untraceable step* power.

Untraceable Step — **Assassin Utility 16**

The air wavers for a moment before a veil of invisibility covers you from head to toe.

Encounter ✦ Shadow
Move Action **Personal**
Effect: You become invisible and move up to your speed. You remain invisible until the end of your next turn.

Level 17: Shadow Coffin

Those who hire executioners usually want proof of a target's death. The *shadow coffin* power is an application of shadow magic that allows the executioner to bring back more than just a simple token of the assassination; it retrieves the entire body of the intended target. Even in situations when no proof of death is necessary, an executioner might use *shadow coffin* to quickly and expertly dispose of an inconvenient corpse. This is especially important when authorities are investigating nearby.

Benefit: You gain the *shadow coffin* power.

Shadow Coffin — **Assassin Utility**

You trap the target of your assassination in a small object, which keeps the body out of sight until you are ready to release it.

Encounter ✦ Shadow
Free Action **Melee 1**
Trigger: You kill an adjacent creature and don't already have a corpse trapped by this power.
Target: The creature's corpse
Effect: The target disappears and is trapped in a nonmagical object of your choice on your person (such as a handheld mirror, a small gem, or a piece of jewelry). The target remains trapped until you release it or until the object is destroyed. To release the target into an adjacent square, you must hold the object and concentrate for 1 minute.

Level 18: Ability Score Increase

Seemingly, there is no end to how much you can hone your abilities by surrendering to, and taking control of, the power of the dark.

Benefit: You increase two ability scores of your choice by 1.

Level 19: Improved Poison Use

Your mastery of the arts of making and using poison continues to become stronger. Your repertoire of toxins is more debilitating than ever before.

Benefit: You learn the recipe for another 15th-level assassin poison of your choice. When you prepare vials of assassin poison during an extended rest, two of them can be 15th level.

Level 20: Poisoner's Secrets

Guild executioner paragon path feature

When you reach the height of your power within your assassins' guild, you become privy to the secrets and mysteries that your guild's poisonmasters have held for many years. You not only learn the secret to crafting the deadly poison known as wyvern venom, you also learn how to mix your poisons more efficiently so that you can craft more of them in the same amount of time.

Benefit: You learn the recipe for the assassin poison *wyvern venom*. During an extended rest, you can prepare a 20th-level assassin poison that does not count as one of the poisons you can normally prepare.

Wyvern Venom

The secret to creating this rare and potent toxin is closely guarded by the most powerful assassins' guilds. Versatile in its application, it not only does injury to a creature's body, it rots away flesh and bone, melts sinew, and boils the blood. Even after the initial shock of the effect of the venom is over, the pain and damage inflicted by the poison linger, making it difficult for the body to heal. The base of the poison is the venom from an actual wyvern, though the poison used by executioners is the result of a complex alchemical process that increases its potency tenfold.

Wyvern Venom **Level 20**

This poison is far more dangerous than that delivered by the sting of a wyvern itself, as a result of the alchemical process that produces this inky-black liquid.

Assassin Poison

Power (Consumable ✦ Necrotic, Poison): Minor Action. You apply the poison to your melee weapon or one piece of your ammunition. During this encounter, the next creature you hit with a weapon attack using the poisoned item takes 25 extra necrotic and poison damage.

Power (Consumable ✦ Necrotic, Poison): Minor Action. You pour the poison into a drink or onto a plate of food. Within the next hour, the first creature to consume the food or drink takes necrotic and poison damage equal to half of its bloodied value, and it cannot regain hit points until the end of its next extended rest.

Power (Consumable ✦ Necrotic, Poison): Minor Action. You apply the poison to a single handheld object. Within the next hour, the first creature other than you to hold or wear the object for more than 1 minute takes necrotic and poison damage equal to half of its bloodied value, and it cannot regain hit points until the end of its next extended rest.

Epic Executioner

By the time you reach the epic tier, you are much more than a simple killer for hire: You are among the greatest assassins ever to have lived. Elemental princes watch over their shoulders for a sign that you might be lurking in their shadows, and the very whisper of your name sends chills through the courts of the fey.

When your executioner reaches 21st level, he or she takes on an epic destiny of your choice. This epic destiny represents the grand finale of your adventuring career, and like your paragon path, it grants a set of related features and powers.

EXECUTIONER EPIC TIER

Total XP	Level	Feats Known	Class Features and Powers
175,000	21	+1	Ability score increase Epic destiny feature
210,000	22	+1	*Ignore barriers*
255,000	23	–	Improved Death Attack
310,000	24	+1	Ability score increase Epic destiny feature
375,000	25	–	Improved Poison Use
450,000	26	+1	Epic destiny feature
550,000	27	–	–
675,000	28	+1	Ability score increase
825,000	29	–	Improved Poison Use
1,000,000	30	+1	Epic destiny feature

Level 21: Ability Score Increase

Your entrance into the epic tier is heralded by a rush of vitality and clarity. You are now stronger, wiser, and even more unassailable.

Benefit: Each of your ability scores increases by 1.

Level 21: Epic Destiny Feature

As you enter the epic tier, your final destiny comes into focus. Perhaps you are fated to save the world from some great evil, or maybe fate has dictated that you must fight against a god. The destiny you pursue shapes you just as your actions shape the cosmos.

Benefit: You gain a feature associated with your epic destiny.

Level 22: Ignore Barriers

Executioners often receive assignments to assassinate powerful individuals that cordon themselves off from the world behind walls of stone and gates of steel. This power allows you to use shadow magic to cause walls, doors, and other objects to temporarily fade from existence when you approach them, allowing you to pass through barriers that would keep other creatures out.

Benefit: You gain the *ignore barriers* power.

Ignore Barriers — Assassin Utility 22

Your physical form becomes as unstable as a shadow, allowing you to step through physical barriers with ease.

Daily ✦ Shadow
Minor Action — **Personal**
Effect: You are phasing until the end of the encounter.

Level 23: Improved Death Attack

Your gift for executing the weak and dying allows you to put down creatures of greater power quickly and without a mess. Your attacks rarely leave your enemies at death's door; instead, they escort your enemies through that door into death's parlor.

Benefit: When you hit an enemy with a melee or a ranged attack that deals damage, you can choose to reduce the target to 0 hit points automatically if it has 30 hit points or fewer after the damage is dealt.

Level 24: Ability Score Increase

Yet again, the darkness in your soul works physical and mental changes within you.

Benefit: You increase two ability scores of your choice by 1.

Level 24: Epic Destiny Feature

Your place in the cosmic order becomes cemented as you gain still more power. At this point, fate seems to bend and weave to ensure your survival.

Benefit: You gain a feature associated with your epic destiny.

Level 25: Improved Poison Use

Like any other field of learning, mastery of poisons comes only after a long period of practice and diligent studying. As you approach the apex of knowledge in the poisoning arts, you learn how to manipulate poisons extracted from the bodies of powerful beings such as angels, basilisks, and dragons.

Benefit: You learn the recipe for a 25th-level assassin poison of your choice. When you prepare vials of assassin poison during an extended rest using your Poison Use feature, one can be up to 25th level and two can be up to 15th level.

Dark Reaver Powder

Said to come from the pulverized bodies of angels devoted to gods of death, dark reaver powder has the ability to knock a creature unconscious for a long time. Assassins use dark reaver powder to get enemies out of the way without killing them or to send a message not to cross the wrong person. When applied in powder form to a weapon, the poison seeps into the blood and produces a diluted effect that renders enemies woozy for a short period of time.

Dark Reaver Powder — Level 25

This black powder can render a creature comatose if consumed.

Assassin Poison
Power (Consumable ✦ Poison): Minor Action. You apply the poison to your melee weapon or five pieces of your ammunition. Until the end of the encounter, when you hit a creature with a weapon attack using the poisoned item, the creature takes 10 extra poison damage, and it is dazed until the end of your next turn.
Power (Consumable ✦ Poison): Minor Action. You pour the poison into a drink or onto a plate of food. Within the next hour, the first creature to consume the food or drink falls unconscious (save ends). The creature can make a saving throw against this unconsciousness only at the end of an extended rest and does so with a -5 penalty.

Dragon Bile

Dragon bile is one of the most sought-after substances harvested from dragons. It can be made into a deadly poison that can slay a person in a matter of minutes. The dragon bile used by assassins is among the most potent, and is harvested from the bodies of powerful and ancient dragons slain by adventurers. A brief touch of dragon bile can make it impossible for a creature to move or do anything else, while prolonged exposure is almost always fatal.

Dragon Bile Level 25

Harvested from the bodies of ancient dead dragons, this poison is one of the most lethal.

Assassin Poison

Power (Consumable ✦ Poison): Minor Action. You apply the poison to a melee weapon or one piece of your ammunition. During this encounter, the next creature you hit with a weapon attack using the poisoned item falls prone, and it is stunned until the end of your next turn.

Power (Consumable ✦ Poison): Minor Action. You apply the poison to a single handheld object. Within the next hour, the first creature other than you to hold or wear the object for more than 1 minute dies, but only if the creature is your level or lower.

Eye of Basilisk Powder

Among the rarest of poisons used by assassins, eye of basilisk powder is exceptionally potent in minute quantities. The eyes of actual basilisks (harvested at great expense by adventurers) are dried out and ground into a powder that, when properly prepared, can turn its victims to stone. Assassins put small amounts of the powder into alchemical pellets that explode when broken to release a small cloud of the poison around the victim.

Eye of Basilisk Powder Level 25

This unremarkable white powder harnesses the petrifying ability of the basilisk.

Assassin Poison

Power (Consumable ✦ Implement, Poison): Standard Action. *Effect:* You make the following attack.

Ranged 5

Target: One creature

Attack: Dexterity vs. Reflex

Hit: 6d10 + Dexterity modifier poison damage.

Miss: Half damage.

Effect: The target is slowed (save ends). *First Failed Saving Throw:* The target is instead immobilized (save ends). *Second Failed Saving Throw:* The target is instead petrified (save ends).

Power (Consumable ✦ Poison): Standard Action. You place the poison in a closed container, such as a chest or a jewelry box. Make the attack above against the first creature to open the container within the next hour.

Level 26: Epic Destiny Feature

Your foes' worst attacks cannot sway you from the great goal that lies before you. When all seems lost, you have the strength and determination to deny death and fight on.

Benefit: You gain a feature (typically a utility power) associated with your epic destiny.

Level 28: Ability Score Increase

Your destiny is not yet fulfilled, and you need to be stronger and sharper to stand up to the challenges that await.

Benefit: You increase two ability scores of your choice by 1.

Level 29: Improved Poison Use

If there's anyone in the world better at the poisoner's art than you, it's only because that individual hasn't crossed paths with you yet.

Benefit: You learn the recipe for another 25th-level assassin poison of your choice. When you prepare vials of assassin poison during an extended rest using your Poison Use feature, two of them can be up to 25th level and one can be up to 15th level.

Level 30: Epic Destiny Feature

You have achieved the absolute pinnacle of your abilities. On the verge of facing your destiny, you gain one final edge that could spell the difference between ultimate victory and utter defeat.

Benefit: You gain a feature associated with your epic destiny.

Totem Creatures of the Far Realm:
The Aberrant Souls

By Galen Mullins and Jim Auwaerter
Illustrations by Alex Aparin

Throughout the world, there are those who find themselves touched by the Far Realm. Perhaps they possess an innate sensitivity to the Outside's emanations, or they might have sought a link for their own purposes. Regardless, the subtle and horrible influence of the Far Realm lingers, and these unfortunates must find a way to deal with their connection to the place beyond. Most try to reject that taint, hoping it will fade with time. The aberrant soul instead strengthens the tie to create a link with a Far Realm denizen. By choosing a particular aberrant creature as their totem, aberrant souls gain some of that creature's power... and more importantly, a razor's edge of control over the corruption that threatens to overwhelm sanity.

Finding a Calling

Aberrant souls are few in number. It is no small thing to forge the unnatural link that gives them power. Few even believe that such a thing is possible. Each aberrant soul discovers the way alone, learning the rites from scratch and guesswork. But what leads them to walk such a difficult path?

Some have always been able to sense the Far Realm. A young druid lurches awake every night, sweating from his nightmares of contorting masses of flesh and bone. He may seek the bond to understand why he is plagued each night, and to gain control over his dreaming. A shaman initiate summons her first

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spirit, and calls a mass of writhing tentacles and eyestalks. Perhaps she has no choice in the matter, her primal summons inexorably twisted by the Outside. Or perhaps she decides to embrace the strangeness as a gift that no other shaman could replicate. For these individuals, forming a bond with a totem creature allows them to shape their innate connection to the Far Realm into something they are able to influence.

But there are some whose ambitions drive them to terrible lengths. They witness the power of the Far Realm and desire it for themselves. A monk believes that to defeat a threat, she must first know the threat. She alters her mind and body, changing so that she may truly understand these alien creatures. A barbarian of the wolf tribe barely survives a battle with a gibbering mouther. He decides that his totem animal is too weak, and takes the creature that nearly defeated him as his new exemplar. These aberrant souls seek the power of the maddening place beyond, though they will find it comes at great cost.

Characters descended from the foulborn bloodline (*Psionic Power*) are drawn toward becoming aberrant souls nearly as strongly as they are drawn toward fully psionic classes.

Leaving Society Behind

As people who have experienced the ineffable touch of the Far Realm, aberrant souls are viewed with a certain amount of suspicion. It can be difficult to hide the mental and physical changes an aberrant totem creature can bestow.

Tribal societies have a variety of reactions to the primal character that becomes an aberrant soul. Some are treated as pariahs—the elders claiming that such activities create a bridge between the Far Realm and the natural world. Other tribes may be awed by the terrible power that an aberrant soul possesses, and name the character as the tribe's champion. Reactions vary, but one thing is certain; once discovered, an aberrant soul is set apart from the rest of the tribe.

Hardly surprising, therefore, that many aberrant souls live as hired mercenaries or adventurers. It is easier to hide one's true nature among people who have never experienced the touch of the Far Realm and who don't recognize its influence. Some don't even bother to hide their strangeness from their new allies, taking advantage of the pragmatic attitude that many adventurers possess.

The Morphic Web

Becoming an aberrant soul changes the way one perceives the world. All aberrant souls are aware of the danger of the Outside's soundless whispers, and know they cannot rely on their own senses to keep madness at bay. They yearn for someone with whom they can be honest about their fears of straying too far from sanity. This need has driven some aberrant souls to seek one another. Who could understand their condition better than another who has been touched by the Far Realm? Over time, these occasional contacts have coalesced into an informal network known as the Morphic Web.

When a member of the Web meets someone who might be a fellow aberrant soul, the pair begin a complicated verbal dance, for only a fool would admit the secrets of an aberrant soul to a stranger. They use euphemism and metaphor to convey their similarity, identifying themselves through innocent if puzzling phrases like "I awoke one morning to see that the stars were alive" or "Have you ever trained three-eyed frogs to speak?" This interchange always ends with a key phrase: "Tell me, do you know any other like-minded friends?" If the stranger answers with the names of other Web members, then the questioner has found a member of the Web. If the stranger does not, but does reveal a Far Realm connection, the Web member reveals the existence of the organization and its purpose.

Each member of the Web knows five or six contacts, meeting with one or two each year to discuss the status of their mutual friends, share stories of their recent adventures, and pass along any information they have gathered on the Outside. Though these conversations seem innocuous to outsiders, they serve a hidden purpose. Each aberrant soul analyzes the discussion to determine if the other still holds the upper hand over madness. In cases where one is slipping, the other will attempt to reestablish a sense of reality. Warning someone that "tentacles grasp strongly and can pull you under" is a key phrase within the Web that is often enough to shock the hearer into swift action. If this attempt fails, members of the Web have a final duty—when an aberrant soul falls into madness, he or she must be neutralized before becoming a danger to the world.

This watchful patience is normally the extent of the collaboration and organization of the Morphic Web. However, some twenty years ago, a call went out warning of a threat that required all members to work together. A shaman named Kalandas had become known as a prominent Balancer. The Balancers are a faction of the Web that believes that their conduit to the Far Realm works both ways, allowing them to influence their totem creature toward more benign behavior, even as they themselves are influenced by the Outside's attitudes. Most Balancers believe this will be the process of generations or of centuries, but Kalandas believed that he could speed

BACKGROUND: ORPHAN OF THE GIBBERING MASSACRE

You became aware that you were different from a young age. Perhaps your parents flinched in fear when you threw a temper tantrum. You might have sometimes spoken a language no one else could understand, and the alien sounds disturbed them. Most likely, you heard the whispers that seemed to follow you, and felt the stares of the people who looked away just a moment too late.

Perhaps there was one person who followed you around. When others looked away, he or she continued to stare. When you found the courage to approach, you learned the truth. The sins of the parents have been visited on their children, and you have a connection to the Far Realm that most others could never understand... but this person can, because he or she has that connection as well.

Associated Skills: Dungeoneering, Insight

Associated Languages: Deep Speech

Personal Quests: Find the gravesite of your birth parents; permanently close a portal to the Far Realm; destroy a Far Realm creature that threatens the community that adopted you

up the process. He found many followers amongst the tribes of his people, offering power beyond imagining. By turning these followers into aberrant souls, he could more rapidly alter the nature of his totem creature. Instead, he brought the maddening touch of the Far Realm to those who were not strong enough to resist it. As Kalandas imbued his followers with the power of malignant aberrants, he became overwhelmed by the powerful urges of his totem creature. The Morphic Web learned of his blasphemous teachings and took action. In what is now known as the Gibbering Massacre, the entire Web banded together to kill Kalandas and his crazed and gibbering followers. The orphans from this battle were taken to nearby tribes and schools to be raised, away from the touch of the Far Realm. Each orphan is still watched by at least one member of the Web, to see if as they grow, they show signs of corruption, or if they might follow the path of the aberrant soul.

Corruption of the Far Realm

How does the connection to the aberrant totem creature manifest itself? When an aberrant soul uses powers with the psionic keyword, those nearby might hear faint incomprehensible whispers in their minds. When calling upon primal evocations, the spirits summoned are subtly twisted, with echoes of creatures from the Far Realm. The aberrant soul's form alters, subtly at first and becoming more apparent over time. Even so, these changes can usually be explained as the result of some other magic, or concealed without too much difficulty.

The mental changes are far more insidious. To touch the Far Realm is to risk madness, but also to gain unparalleled insight. Aberrant souls experience visions from the perspective of their totem creatures during their dreams and trances. The feeling of malevolent pleasure as a mind flayer consumes its victim or as a gibbering mouther rips apart its prey can lead the weak to madness, but the strong can gain understanding. Stories tell of a druid who traveled a hundred miles to cure a child of the touch of a chaos beast. When asked how she knew the boy had been attacked, and how to cure him, she said only that she

If you wish to add cosmetic changes to your character to show the changes caused by the aberrant connection, some options are listed below. You can choose a trait that most expresses the chosen totem creature, or roll 1d10 to determine what characteristic develops. For a truly volatile body, you can choose to roll every time you gain a level, with a new trait replacing or adding to the old one.

1 Your eyes become entirely black or are covered in a milky white film. Neither effect impairs your ability to see.
2 Your hair is replaced with tentacles.
3 Your eyes bulge from their sockets, and can be extended on short stalks at will.
4 Weeping sores appear on some part of your body.
5 The palms of your hands sprout tiny mouths, and your fingers elongate.
6 Patterns of color move across your body as if something were crawling under your skin.
7 You no longer have eyes—instead, you have smooth skin where your eyes would be. You can still see normally, and can still be blinded.
8 Your skin is cold and slimy, occasionally leaving a thin film on things you touch.
9 When you bleed, your blood is black and viscous, like crude oil.
10 Reroll twice, taking two unique traits (ignore any other rolls of 10 or conflicting traits)

FOR DMS: PLAYER-CHARACTER VISIONS

A player who wants his character to join the Morphic Web might be interested in having that character experience strange and prophetic dreams. Usually, these sorts of plot hooks are handled by NPC seers and madmen, but the Morphic Web hook gives DMs an opportunity to give that information directly to one of the characters. The nature of these visions also lets you provide richer and more bizarre descriptions than you could have an NPC pass along.

That said, you should take care to not overuse these dreams. One character shouldn't be the source of all the plot hooks, and if a character is having a vision every night, it lessens each vision's impact.

had seen it in a dream. In the Underdark, spymasters tell tales of a drow who stopped a major illithid incursion. When a scout's brain was devoured by a mind flayer, the drow used his totemic connection to siphon off the knowledge gained by the mind flayer, and thus learn the scout's findings.

It is possible to try to control these flashes of insight, and some aberrant souls who are more experienced with ritual magic have created a ritual to aid with this control. See the "Aberrant Totemic Link" sidebar for more information.

Below are four paragon paths for characters who wish to further devote themselves to an aberrant totem and take on its traits in exchange for its power. Many of these paths can be reflavored to work with other Far Realm totems. For example, the Phrenic Master could be devoted to an aboleth rather than a mind flayer. Although primal characters are the focus for these paragon paths, they aren't limited to primal classes. Multiclass and hybrid characters that combine the psionic and primal power sources will find options here that can take their stories in interesting new directons.

ABERRANT TOTEMIC LINK

You cloak your mind with the eerie energies of the Far Realm and reach out to an aberrant creature to draw information from it.

Level: 13
Category: Divination
Time: 1 hour
Duration: 1 day or until discharged
Component Cost: 750 gp (see text)
Market Price: 3,200 gp
Key Skill: Dungeoneering

When you master this ritual, you choose a single type of aberrant creature, such as chaos beast or mind flayer. This choice remains fixed throughout your adventuring career. If you are able to create ritual scrolls, any scrolls you create also reflect this choice. This ritual can only be mastered once.

For the ritual's duration, you are able to determine the presence or absence of creatures of the chosen type within 10 miles, but with no specific direction or distance information. If there are any within range, you can connect to the mind of a random creature of that type and try to gain information from it. The strain of making this connection (and of concealing it from the aberrant creature) causes you to lose one healing surge.

Your Dungeoneering check result determines how many questions you can try to find the answers to. Once you have asked all the questions allowed by the ritual, the ritual ends.

Your questions can be as specific or as general as you wish, but the answers you receive back are cryptic and rarely longer than a phrase, a short sentence, or a single image. In particular, aberrant creatures often have different conceptions of time, so questions regarding future events or plans are more likely to result in answers that are incomprehensible. The answers are also limited to what the individual creature knows, and its information could be incorrect if it has been misled by others.

Dungeoneering Check Result	Number of Questions
9 or lower	One
10-19	Two
20-29	Three
30-39	Four
40 or higher	Five

If a particular creature does not know the information you seek, you can try to find another individual who does know it. If there is another such creature, you lose an additional healing surge, and you may re-ask any questions you wish answers for.

Members of the Morphic Web can master and perform this ritual even if they cannot normally master rituals. They also do not lose a healing surge when making the first connection to an aberrant creature.

Formless Predator

"They change into one form at a time. I change into many all at once."

Prerequisite: *Wild shape* power

You desired more fluidity of form and motion than what the masters taught you, so you reached out to a creature you knew would grant the abilities you seek. By claiming the chaos beast as your totem creature, you can take its form, and, in doing so, the form of any shape that its aberrant mind could imagine.

Chaos beasts continually change form, and their strength comes from inflicting changes upon their unwilling foes. In taking their form, such as it is, you grow more powerful. Your body does not move like other creatures. You gain the upper hand by warping your limbs and contorting your joints in unnatural ways, leaving your enemies unable to predict your attacks.

Formless Predator Path Features

Jagged Metamorphosis (11th level): The first time you use *wild shape* each encounter, you gain a +4 bonus to damage rolls until the start of your next turn.

Aberrant Form (11th level): When you use *wild shape* to assume beast form, you can choose to resemble an aberrant creature rather than a natural beast.

Reinstating Action (11th level): When you spend an action point to take an extra action, you can also end one effect on you. You may also shift 1 square before or after the extra action.

Fluid Form (16th level): Choose a 1st-level at-will attack power that you know. That power gains the beast form keyword while you are in beast form, and loses the beast form keyword while you are in humanoid form.

Formless Predator Powers

Undulating Pseudopod — Formless Predator Attack 11

As you flow across the battlefield, a pseudopod briefly forms on your body, reaching out to confound an enemy.

Encounter ✦ Implement, Primal, Psionic
Standard Action **Melee** touch
Target: One creature
Effect: You shift up to your speed. You can make the following attack at any point during this movement.
Attack: Wisdom vs. Reflex
Hit: 3d8 + Wisdom modifier damage, and the target is dazed until the end of your next turn.

Amorphous Return — Formless Predator Utility 12

Nothing can force you into a specific form for long.

Encounter ✦ Primal, Psionic
No Action **Personal**
Trigger: You start your turn and are affected by a polymorph effect or an effect that is petrifying you.
Effect: You end the effect, and you gain 10 temporary hit points.

Touch of Dissolution — Formless Predator Attack 20

With a single touch, your foe's body dissolves into a protoplasmic form.

Daily ✦ Beast Form, Implement, Polymorph, Primal, Psionic
Standard Action **Melee** touch
Target: One creature
Attack: Wisdom vs. Fortitude
Hit: 4d10 + Wisdom modifier damage, and the target is blinded and takes ongoing 15 damage (save ends both).
Each Failed Saving Throw: The ongoing damage increases by 5.
Miss: Half damage, and the target is blinded and takes ongoing 5 damage (save ends both).

Herald of Madness

"I ... it's hard for me to focus... but it'll be even harder for you."

Prerequisite: Barbarian, monk, or ranger

You are intimately familiar with the power that comes with controlling your enemy's emotions. Fear is a good start, but you go even further, pushing fear into madness. You have chosen to draw upon the power of the aberrant creature that brings madness by its mere presence: the gibbering mouther. Your warcry carries the sound of a thousand voices, all shouting different things. Those who hear you claw at their ears, your voice infecting their thoughts and filling their hearts with terror.

With this power comes a change. Your mind... is different, somehow. Some thoughts come only with difficulty, but at times, you know things that your friends and allies believe you had no way of knowing. You may sometimes try to share your unique viewpoint with others, but even your most innocuous comment brings pain.

Herald of Madness Path Features

Befouled Mind (11th level): When an enemy attacks your Will, it takes psychic damage equal to your Dexterity or Strength modifier.

Infectious Madness Action (11th level): When you spend an action point to make an attack, choose one creature hit by that attack. That creature must make a melee basic attack against a creature of your choice as a free action.

Recovery through Pain (16th level): Whenever an ally within 5 squares of you fails a saving throw, that ally can take psychic damage equal to his or her level to reroll the saving throw, with a +2 bonus against charm, fear, or psychic effects. The ally must use the second result.

Herald of Madness Powers

Disorienting Strike — Herald of Madness Attack 11

The initial blow is only the start of your enemy's troubles, as he becomes unsteady and confused.

Encounter ✦ Primal, Psionic, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Dexterity or Strength vs. AC
Hit: 2[W] + Dexterity or Strength modifier damage. The target and any enemy who starts its turn adjacent to the target provoke opportunity attacks from you when shifting or teleporting. This effect lasts until the end of your next turn.
Special: You may use this attack in place of a melee basic attack when charging.

Maddening Redirection — Herald of Madness Utility 12

When an enemy gets near you, it can't distinguish one target from another.

Daily ✦ Primal, Psionic, Stance
Minor Action **Personal**
Effect: You assume the maddening redirection stance. Until the stance ends, when an adjacent enemy damages you with a melee attack while at least one other creature is adjacent to that enemy, you can take only half of the damage and cause a creature adjacent to the enemy to take the other half.

Babbling Rage — Herald of Madness Attack 20

The sense of wrongness which flows out from you leaves your foes open to attack.

Daily ✦ Primal, Psionic, Rage, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Dexterity or Strength vs. Will
Hit: 5[W] + Dexterity or Strength modifier damage.
Miss: Half damage.
Effect: You enter the babbling rage. Until the end of the encounter, enemies adjacent to you grant combat advantage.

Ocular Adept

"I spy with my many eyes, someone about to die."

Prerequisite: Ranger (hunter) or seeker

For those who wish to control their foes from a distance, there is no better totem creature than the beholder. Ocular adepts are seekers who wish to control everything they see. They possess minds bursting with energy, looking for release.

The first and greatest expression of the link with your totem creature is the manifestation of a spiriteye. This weapon resembles nothing more than a ghostly eye which floats in front of the ocular adept. Despite its appearance, a seeker can use some of the principles learned with a mundane ranged weapons to fight with the spiriteye. It takes intense concentration and manipulation of the psionic and primal magics to create the spiriteye, but in time, the ocular adept gains mastery of the weapon and can control it with thought alone.

Like the eye tyrant, you can make several swift attacks at range and float across the battlefield to a safer location. Attacks made with your spiriteye resemble the beholder's dreaded eye rays, and you have the same variety of effects with them (albeit with less control).

Ocular Adept Path Features

Spiriteye Manifestation (11th level): As a free action, you can transform your bow or crossbow into a spiriteye. Your spiriteye uses your weapon's proficiency bonus, damage die, properties, powers, and enhancement bonus, but no longer requires ammunition or any action to load it. This transformation lasts until you dispel it as a minor action, or until the end of your next extended rest.

Blasting Action (11th level): When you spend an action point to make a ranged attack, you can make a ranged basic attack with your spiriteye against a different target as a free action.

Spiriteye Perfection (16th level): Your spiriteye floats above you when you manifest it, and you can mentally control its attacks. It no longer requires any hands to wield it, and when you use it to make a ranged basic attack, it does not provoke opportunity attacks.

Ocular Adept Powers

Totem Eye Beams — Ocular Adept Attack 11

Ghostly eyestalks sprout from your head as eye beams strike your enemies at random.

Encounter ✦ Primal, Psionic, Weapon
Standard Action **Ranged** weapon
Requirement: You must make this attack using your spiriteye.
Target: One or two creatures
Attack: Dexterity or Wisdom vs. Reflex
Hit: 2[W] + Dexterity or Wisdom damage, and roll 1d4 to determine the additional effect.
1. The target is dazed until the end of your next turn.
2. The target is immobilized until the end of your next turn.
3. The target takes 1d10 extra damage.
4. You slide the target up to 4 squares.
Effect: Until the end of your turn, you can fly up to 6 squares as a move action.

Soaring, All-Seeing — Ocular Adept Utility 12

Your head sprouts two eyestalks which gaze about as you glide silently through the sky.

Encounter ✦ Polymorph, Primal, Psionic
Minor Action **Personal**
Effect: Until the end of your next turn, you gain a fly speed of 4, and being flanked doesn't cause you to grant combat advantage.

Rapid Eye Rays of Doom — Ocular Adept Attack 20

Bolts of energy flow from your spiriteye like the attacks of the beholder—swift and deadly.

Daily ✦ Primal, Psionic, Stance
Minor Action **Personal**
Effect: You assume the rapid eye rays of doom stance. Until the stance ends, as a minor action once per round, you can make a ranged basic attack with your spiriteye against an enemy within 5 squares of you. If this attack hits, you can shift one square as a free action.

Phrenic Master

"Kneel before my intellect and tremble."

Prerequisite: *Call spirit companion* power

Your mind is the gateway through which you imprint your will upon the world. In your studies, you have searched for more powerful ways of asserting that will. By choosing the mind flayer as your totem creature, you've gained some of the illithid's natural prowess at bending the wills of lesser beings.

This connection has taught you hidden secrets of mental dominion, and you've found that they can also be applied to the shamanic practice of summoning spirit companions. In order to bind your new spirit companion to your will, you had to prove your dominance over it. Your spirit companion was cowed, to the point that it is more slave than friend. Even so, you know that if you let your guard down for a moment, the slave will try to become the master.

Phrenic Master Path Features

Spiteful Retaliation (11th level): Whenever an enemy attacks your spirit companion and causes it to disappear, that enemy is dazed until the end of its next turn.

Enervating Action (11th level): When you spend an action point to make an attack, any enemy hit by the attack takes a –2 penalty to saving throws against any effects the attack imposes. Enemies hit by the attack grant combat advantage until the end of your next turn.

Twin-Souled Projection (16th level): You can choose to use your spirit companion's space as the origin square for any of your ranged or area powers. If your spirit companion is not adjacent to any enemies, using a power in this manner does not provoke opportunity attacks.

Phrenic Master Powers

Intellect Pummel — Phrenic Master Attack 11

Your attack may not be as potent as an illithid's mind blast, but you're satisfied to see your foes stumble about at your whim.

Encounter ✦ Charm, Implement, Primal, Psionic, Psychic
Standard Action **Close** blast 5
Target: Each creature in the blast
Attack: Wisdom vs. Will
Hit: 2d6 + Wisdom modifier psychic damage, and the target is dazed until the end of your next turn.
Effect: You slide each target up to 2 squares.
Special: You can use your spirit companion's square as the origin for this attack.

Minion's Shield — Phrenic Master Utility 12

As the attack speeds towards you, you decide that your spirit companion should take the blow instead.

Encounter ✦ Primal, Psionic, Spirit
Immediate Interrupt **Personal**
Trigger: You take damage from an attack while your spirit companion is adjacent to you.
Effect: Your spirit companion takes the damage instead of you.

Total Subjugation — Phrenic Master Attack 20

Your spirit companion engulfs your enemy completely, controlling its movement as you control its mind.

Daily ✦ Charm, Implement, Primal, Psionic, Spirit
Standard Action **Melee** spirit 1
Target: One creature
Attack: Wisdom vs. Reflex
Hit: The target is dominated (save ends).
Miss: The target is dazed (save ends).
Effect: If your spirit companion is adjacent to the target at the start of its turn, you can slide the target up to 4 squares and slide your spirit companion up to 4 squares to a square adjacent to the target. This effect persists only while the target is dazed or dominated by this power.

About the Authors

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Channel Divinity: Corellon's Devoted

By Robert J. Schwalb
Illustration by Matias Tapas

Magic, art, renewal, and beauty—these are the Protector's provinces, the gifts ancient Corellon bestowed upon the mortal world when Creation's dew still lay wet across the land. He is the originator of arcane magic, having seeded its power in the world. It is said he himself planted the first forests, and the most ancient woods still bear his mark in the towering trees who command the lands all around. The greatest artistic achievements, the most brilliant paintings and heart-wrenching epics owe their inspiration to him, the Divine Muse. Corellon, First of the Seldarine, Protector, Creator of all Elvenkind, the Coronal of Arvandor is among the greatest gods in the Astral Sea and that which flows from his presence is wondrous in its glory, terrible in its fury.

History, Legends, and Myths

"You have come seeking truth about Corellon. To this I will ask you a question. What is truth when it comes to the gods? What is history and what is legend? Is there a difference? Is it not said that Corellon sired the elven races? You have heard the tale where elves rose from his blood spilled by Gruumsh during that fateful contest where Corellon took the monstrous god's eye. But have you also heard the tale in which Corellon battled the Spider Queen and cast her into the abyssal darkness? It is said elvenkind also rose from the blood she spilled. There is also the tale of how the elven people were born from those tears he shed during the times of the Triune Harmony, with the races rising from tears of sorrow, beauty, and mirth. What would you say if I told you all three tales were true? How can this be? Corellon is a god, and with the gods all things are possible."

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Eladrin priests raise their voices in song as night falls in the Feywild to welcome the Azure Star as it rises in the firmament. A gnarled elven mystic leads the hunters in the Litany of Arrows before the hunt, building courage and resolve in those who would prowl the woodlands to harvest orc scalps. A drow priestess wrenches an elf's heart free from a sundered priest, offering blasphemous curses to the sire who exiled them to the banished darkness. A frustrated poet offers up a prayer to the Divine Muse for the inspiration he needs to complete the epic on which he has toiled for so long, while a mage in a tower's top offers thanks to Corellon before beginning the ritual that will open the portal needed to cross a thousand miles in the blink of an eye. Who is this god to whom all these mortals turn? What legends inform the middle world to this heavenly presence who fills the heart with passion, who girds the spirit against ugliness, and who reveals magic's secrets with no expectation of recompense?

A Gift of Magic

"Fools pray to Ioun and Vecna to master arcane magic. Those usurpers are nothing but pretenders and corruptors; they twist magic into obscene forms that have nothing to do with the beauty and artfulness expressed by the first to master its power."

There was a time when mages did not exist, when sorcery and its power were reserved for the gods alone. There was a time when magic was beyond mortal ken. Many take arcane energy for granted since it pervades the middle world, abundant and powerful, captured in complex formulas or acquired through tainted blood and fell pacts forged with alien powers. One can find arcane energies shining in the world's bright reflection and skulking in its shadows. It spawns the endless storms troubling the Elemental Chaos and sparkles in the Astral Sea's endless vistas. Arcane magic is everywhere, available to anyone with the talent or training to master it.

Corellon brought arcane magic to the world, no one will deny, not even those priests who serve Ioun and Vecna. The question, however, is why. The most powerful magic-users can rival the gods themselves, so many have wondered why Corellon would compromise the gods' power. There are those who believe Corellon unwittingly brought magic to the world. When he descended from the Astral Sea to survey what the primordials had wrought, arcane magic simply flowered in his footsteps. Others suggest Corellon bestowed magic to mortals as a means of empowering them to beautify the world, to transform it from its ugly, ill-formed state into a paradise. Then again, there are tales where Corellon pitied mortals and gave them the means to defend themselves against the primordials who sought their destruction.

Any or all of these tales may be true, but the oldest eladrin records explain they were the first to master arcane energy and that they were the ones to codify the formulas wizards and others now memorize to cast their spells. Many eladrin resent traditions outside those learned by wizards for they circumvent the limitations they built into magic-use to prevent its abuse. Some have even gone so far as to say that the eladrin secrets were stolen by other races and perverted and twisted into obscene forms such as that used by warlocks, sorcerers, and bards.

Elvenkind's Sire

"Respect any god you wish, my friend, but never forget the debt you owe to the Protector. We elves would not be without his blood and tears."

Elvenkind—those peoples known as the eladrin, elves, and drow—owes its existence to Corellon for it was he who gave them shape, who filled their vessels with spirits, and gave to them his many blessings. As with all legends involving Corellon, elvenkind's origins are confused thanks to competing legends upheld by the various groups now scattered across the planes. The most widely accepted story claims that the elves arose from the tears Corellon wept from sorrow, beauty, and mirth during the days before Lolth's fall, when he lived in perfect harmony with her and her sister Sehanine. From sorrow's tears rose the dark elves, from beauty's the high elves, and from mirth the wood elves. All three peoples lived in perfect harmony, honoring their maker and the Seldarine as was their due. Lolth's corruption, however, poisoned the dark elves against their kin, and a terrible war sundered them forever.

While this myth is perfectly serviceable for most elvenkind, different and much older tales paint a different story. The oldest stories suggest that Lolth was not, in fact, Sehanine's sister but was a vile demon who seduced Corellon. From their union was born the drow. When Corellon realized what he had created, he fought the Spider Queen and banished her and her hate-filled brood into the darkness, where they would languish for all time. The blood from injuries Corellon sustained in this titanic battle spilled unto the natural world, and where the droplets fell, the elves were born.

Another tale suggests the elves and orcs were all formed during an early conflict between Corellon and Gruumsh. Heretical priests claim these two gods were twin children from a forgotten primogenitor god, and each was the mirror image of the other. Where Corellon was beauty, reason, excellence, and magic, Gruumsh was chaos, darkness, ugliness, and savagery. The two came to blows many times, but it wasn't until they sought to stake their claims on Creation that the titanic struggle for dominance exploded. This duel culminated in Gruumsh losing an eye to Corellon's blade (or arrow in elven myth), and the spilled blood from Gruumsh produced orcs while that from Corellon produced elves. If this tale is true, then there is an unsettling bond between these two races—one no right-thinking elf would dare to accept.

Corellon and the Spider Queen

The world's myths describe the many struggles between the gods, their triumphs and failures, the old grudges and bitter disputes that have, in many ways, shaped the world into its present form. The hatred between Tiamat and Bahamut is the stuff of legends. Theologians can recount the War of Winter and the Raven Queen's triumph over Nerull, the god of the dead. Yet of all the tales describing the gods' wars, few equal the horror and consequences of that between Corellon and Lolth.

In many tales, Lolth is held to have been Sehanine's sister and the third god making up the Triune Harmony. These three gods dwelled in the Feywild, living among their creations and apart from the other gods and their efforts to create the Lattice of Heaven. As the Dawn War escalated with the primordials' invading the Astral Sea, something twisted Lolth's heart and turned her against her companions. Some have suggested that Lolth had monitored the wars and believed none could stop the elemental powers. Other tales claim the Chained God and his demons corrupted her. A few tales claim she hated her sister and wanted Corellon for himself. The truth is forever lost, but the results are very much with the world still.

Lolth's corruption infected her priests, who in turn poisoned many eladrin against Corellon and Sehanine. Those who would not join them in rising up against the gods were slaughtered. A great war was fought in the Feywild, and the struggle brought ruin to its cities and darkened the lands all around. Lolth and her servants were eventually defeated but at a terrible price to all. Corellon flung Lolth and her demons into the Abyss, where they would languish for all eternity, an event Corellon grieves forever.

What remorse he felt for his part in Lolth's fate did not, however, extend to her followers. There would be no mercy for the dark elves, no compassion for their fall. Corellon hurled them out from the Feywild and into the mortal world before sealing them inside Torog's own prison, the Underdark's endless corridors, where they would feel the light's warmth never again.

To the people who resisted Lolth's temptation, Corellon gave a warning. He instructed them to guard against the banished darkness, lest Lolth's poison infect them as it had their kindred. He painted the drow as being beyond redemption, doomed to follow their Spider Queen into the Abyss with no hope for salvation beyond their mortal lives. Corellon understood clearly that Lolth and her kin would never relent in their thirst for sun-kissed blood and would trouble elvenkind until time's end, so he commanded elvenkind to always be ready to drive back the darkness wherever it emerges.

Corellon and Sehanine then withdrew from the Feywild; the Dawn War's destruction had grown so great they could no longer ignore its threat. This was the last the Feywild saw of Corellon and Sehanine, for the primal ban established at the Dawn War's conclusion bound the pair as tightly as it did the other gods and ensured Corellon and Sehanine would not interfere in mortal affairs again.

The Dawn War

Lolth's betrayal could not have come at a worse time. While Corellon, Sehanine, and the rest of the Seldarine led the elves and eladrin against the drow and their demonic allies, the Astral Sea had become a battleground. Resentful of the gods meddling with Creation, the primordials sought to destroy what they had built. The gods, whose interest in the natural world was by then more than passing, stepped in to protect what they had claimed for themselves. In response, the primordials invaded the Astral Sea. War raged unchecked, shattering the gods' efforts at building a unified heaven, reducing their dominions to ruins, and littering the plane with the corpses of gods, exarchs, and primordials alike.

The Dawn War's costs are still being reckoned even after millennia. Arvandor, a paradise that the Triune Harmony had hoped to use as a retreat, lay in ruins. The surviving gods squabbled over what was to be done with the abominations they had created to fight the elemental armies. Sehanine persuaded Corellon to side with her, Avandra, and Melora against the other deities and their efforts to seal off Carceri, a horrid place that spawned the abominations, and withdrew to their plane and its

troubles. Since then, Corellon has had little to do with the other gods.

The Maiming of Gruumsh

Although many tales claim the contest between Gruumsh and Corellon gave birth to the elven races, other elven theologians believe the maiming occurred after the Dawn War's conclusion. Corellon was reluctant to embrace mortals outside elvenkind. He had long regarded humans, halflings, and others as minor beings less refined and less worthy of his notice. As other sources have recounted, Corellon, at Sehanine's prompting, turned his azure gaze to the world's people and found, after living among them, that he was wrong. Like his beloved children, these peoples also appreciated beauty and art, song and poem. They could work the magic he had given the world to an extent that their innovations with the art almost equaled those of the eladrin in their shining cities. After these realizations, Corellon welcome devotees from other races and bewtowed on them gifts and wisdom, inspiration and wonder at the many possibilities this world contains.

It was during this time that Gruumsh and Corellon are said to have had their infamous battle. The two had clashed many times, but in their efforts to gain mortal followers, both saw a fight like no other in their history. The two battled for seven days and nights, with neither gaining ground against the other. On they fought, spawning quakes in the earth and storms in the sky until Gruumsh let down his guard. He was distracted for but a moment, but Corellon seized upon it and claimed his enemy's eye. With his wound spurting black blood that spawned horrific monsters, the dark god fled in pain, agony, and a welter of curses that Corellon would know only sadness and grief.

The distraction that cost Gruumsh his eye is the subject of long debate. The elves, who point to this conflict as a great moment in their god's history, claim that there was no real distraction but only Gruumsh's failing strength. The orcs, however, claim that Sehanine tricked their god by drawing his attention with her wicked wiles long enough for Corellon to strike. The drow claim it was Lolth who won this victory for Corellon, yet the god offered her only exile and pain as her reward. Perhaps none are true; perhaps all of them are. The only witnesses were the gods themselves, and they offer no explanations to mortals.

Corellon in the World

Corellon's reluctance to embrace other races has to some extent stunted his presence among the world's peoples. He is the principle deity among the eladrin and other Feywild races, but on many fronts in the natural world, other gods encroach on his spheres of influence. For example, although Corellon is acknowledged as the father and giver of arcane magic, most wizard academies are founded in Ioun's name. Many look to Melora for guidance when it comes to taming the land, even though Corellon embodies the wonder and beauty of the wilderness. Artists offer prayers to Avandra and Sehanine, even though the aesthetic is clearly under Corellong's purview. Despite losing ground in some corners, Corellon's followers are found among nearly every race and culture across the planes.

Common Worship

Common folk offer prayers to Corellon as they do to most gods. Most ordinary petitioners come to the Corellon for inspiration. A painter might whisper a prayer before setting a brush to canvas, while a poet might make an offering at Corellon's shrine before performing his next work. Rustics all invoke his name during the rites of spring. Mages, even those who revere Ioun above all, look to Corellon for guidance and wisdom in mastering their spells and rituals,.

Now as always, Corellon finds his most ardent followers among the eladrin. They pray to the god for the same reasons others do, but the eladrin also see Corellon as a warrior god. They honor him and his devotion to excellence by mastering the weapons he favors—the longbow and longsword—and weave arcane magic into swordplay. The artistry Corellon inspires extends beyond the brush and the sculptor's chisel; it can be found in the deft strike from a blade or a well-cast spell.

Among all elves, Corellon remains an important figure; none forget his part in their creation. Corellon shares center stage with Sehanine, whom many favor as a less severe goddess and whose furtive ways are in keeping with elven culture. Some have gone so far as to elevate Melora above Corellon, but these are the wildest elves. To them, Melora reflects the wilderness in which they live.

Corellon Backgrounds

Corellon calls many people to his service, drawing initiates from all walks, all social classes, and all races. Your background elements are a good place to start for establishing your character as one of Corellon's chosen. The best place to look is in elements connected to Corellon's domains—arcana, skill, and wilderness. For arcana, you might have been a scholar, finding the god in the dusty tomes you cherish. You might have been a hedge wizard when you felt inspired to delve deeper into magical study. If skill is more your thing, artisan is a great choice, especially if you decide you excelled at what you did. Wilderness is a bit broader and can cover a variety of elements, from farmer to forest, guide to hunter. The following backgrounds provide several new options for being called to the faith.

Artist: You were a painter, a sculptor, a poet, a writer, or some other form of artist. What was your medium? Did you study under a master? Who was he or she? Were you well known in your trade? Have you come across any of your works?

Associated Skills: Diplomacy, History

Associated Quests: Retrieve an artifact of Corellon or a great work of eladrin art stolen by the drow and hidden in the Underdark; rediscover the fragments of eons-old epic poems and assemble them into a definitive retelling of the battle between Corellon and Gruumsh; locate and rededicate a shrine of Corellon that was destroyed during the Dawn War.

Fey Blood: Some distant ancestor was an elf, eladrin, drow, or other fey humanoid. Though the generations have diluted your fey heritage, you still feel a kinship with your cousin races. Who was this ancestor? Why was this ancestor important? How did you learn about this mysterious connection? How has it changed your life?

Associated Skills: Arcana, Perception

Associated Languages: Elven

Associated Quests: Trace the sundered branches of your family tree to reconnect with your distant fey relatives; spread reverence for Corellon to a region where nonfey have forgotten or rejected his gifts; create a lasting pact between two warring communities of elves and humans, dwarves, or another race.

Guide: You put your knowledge about the countryside to good use as a guide. Where did you work? What sites did you see? Who were some of your clients? Were they at all responsible for why you became an adventurer?

Associated Skills: Nature, Perception

Associated Languages: Elven

Associated Quests: Find and permanently mark unknown fey crossings; lead an expedition into the Astral Plane; earn the trust and cooperation of the treants in an important undertaking.

Witch: You were a witch, a hedge mage, or village wise person. Did you have genuine magical skill or was your knowledge invested in herbal healing? Were you welcome in your community or did they treat you as an outsider?

Associated Skills: Arcana, Heal, Nature

Associated Quests: Save a village from mystical marauders; identify and befriend angry primal spirits; destroy a temple of Lolth.

Symbols and Vestments

The earliest symbol associated with Corellon was the crescent moon, an icon similar to that used by Sehanine's priesthood today. Corellon's priests moved away from the moon image at some time after the banished darkness, when Corellon cast out the drow. It was said he placed the Azure Star in the night sky to serve as a warning to those drow who return to the surface. He would be watching always.

The crescent moon can still be found in older temples, holy books, and similar works, but more and more the starburst gains prominence, especially among the more militant branches of the faith. The starburst is often worn as clasps, pendants, or woven into cloaks, tabards, and robes. During religious ceremonies, ordained priests wear gossamer robes in sky blue and embroidered with stars. Silver circlets featuring the starburst are common accessories. Traveling and adventuring priests show their affiliation with sky blue cloaks and favor chainmail, longswords, and longbows in imitation of their divine patron.

Depictions show Corellon as an androgynous elven or eladrin being, sometimes male, other times female (it's believed Corellon can assume either gender, or even both at the same time). Most portraits and sculptures show Corellon as male and dressed in battle regalia, fine mail, a sky blue cloak, with longsword and longbow. His golden hair hangs in curls from his head and frame perfect, beautiful features. Corellon may be shown as wandering the earth, fighting primordials, Gruumsh, or Lolth, or alongside other deities of particular import to the fey peoples. Sehanine, his bride, is often at his side. Other works may depict the Seldarine, those lesser powers dwelling with them in Arvandor. No works

showing Corellon, Sehanine, and Lolth together are known to exist, though the most ancient temples show damage in places where Lolth might have once been represented.

Omens and Signs

Rare is the mortal who communes directly with the gods. Most divine servants rely on missives dispatched from angels, exarchs, or through auguries performed to ascertain the god's will. Gods do not often speak with their divine servants, but they can and do make their will known through omens and signs.

Stars and celestial phenomena are important signs, each interpreted as a direct communication from the god. The blue star's appearance always signifies Corellon's interest. A falling star suggests Corellon offers support. A falling star moving across or from the crescent moon, however, clearly indicates Corellon's displeasure.

Gemstones, the diamond, star sapphire, and star ruby, are also important omens. Their discovery signals good fortune, while their loss implies imminent defeat. Such stones are also used in crystallomancy rituals—scrying rituals that use gemstones as foci rather than still pools, mirrors, and the like.

When Corellon is displeased, his signs are obvious. A lone tree with leaves turned out of season or the sound of three twigs snapping in short succession are always bad signs. On the other hand, Corellon can reveal his favor in personal ways. Epiphanies and bouts of sudden, powerful inspiration are common blessings. A burst of physical strength could warn a devotee to a hidden danger. Should the god take a direct hand, he might manifest as a glowing blue mist and settle over and infuse a location, object, or individual.

Major Precepts

Corellon remains important to the elven peoples because he embodies their highest cultural ideals. Corellon is the ageless wonder, ever striving for physical and spiritual perfection. He is all the elves once were and in his light, the elves see the way forward to what they can become. Mortals look to Corellon for inspiration in artistic endeavors, innovations in magic, and excellence in all that they do. Corellon asks little from his followers, focusing on three major concerns.

Beauty

Beauty lies all around, in mist-clouded mountain valleys, the stars sparkling in the firmament, the towering trees and their swaying branches. Corellon fosters loveliness in the world and expects his followers to cultivate beauty in all that they do. Many uninitiated believe that Corellon is chiefly concerned with outward appearance, but the aesthetic he champions can manifest in an artful dance, a stirring sonnet, a warrior's grace, or an honesty of purpose. Excellence is beauty as much as are the arrangements of a mortal's features or the shapeliness of his or her body.

Although Corellon opposes the drow and orcs, who are both traditionally evil peoples, the opposition stems not from immorality but from their encompassing ugliness. There is no beauty in drow behavior. Blood sacrifice and consorting with demons stains their souls until they are hideous to behold. Orcs, who are violent, unsubtle, and crude, are the antithesis of Corellon's virtues.

One can imagine, however, Corellite priests not only tolerating evil in their midst but even going so far as to celebrate it, provided it was done in an artful or attractive manner. Likewise, even priests are sometimes blinded by their own vanity and fail to see the inner beauty possessed by outwardly ugly creatures—this has always contributed to the long-standing animosity between elves and dwarves, who seem thick, ungainly, and uncouth to most elves.

Preservation

The elves were among the first humanoid races, and thus their works and civilizations are some of the most ancient in the world. Eladrin cities in the Feywild have stood since before mankind emerged from caves, as alluring and breathtaking then as they are today. Given their great age, many works have been lost, vanished into greedy hands or in

LIFE AS AN ELVEN PRIEST

Anyone can serve Corellon, but elves (elves and eladrin) priests have special expectations placed upon them. These devout cleave to their god's commandments but place a greater emphasis on protecting their people. As an elven priest, you are also expected to:

- Safeguard the elves and their holdings. Elvenkind is your paramount concern.
- Seek out and recover lost elven relics, for other races cannot be trusted with their safety.
- Be vigilant against the Spider Queen. Her lies and treachery promote ugliness and corruption.
- Wage war eternal against the banished darkness. The drow are your greatest foes.
- Suffer not the orc to live.

no-long-inhabited ruins. As there are few records about who fashioned what, it falls to Corellon's priests to venture into the world and recover magical relics, rituals, and other wondrous items for study and safekeeping. The priests justify what some see as theft as simply reclaiming that which is rightfully theirs. Corellon bestowed magic onto mortals, and since those mortals are no longer around to use these gifts, it is best for such treasures to return from whence they came.

Although charged by their god to reclaim magic in all its forms, Corellite priests recognize that magical treasures have their place and purpose; if they can be used to advance a higher ideal, there is no conflict in allowing another to use that item. The elf will likely outlive the companion anyway, and recovering the item after the bearer moves on is better than fighting over it. Corellite attitudes toward magical treasures are another contentious point between elves and dwarves. The dwarves could care less what the elven priests claim: dwarven work is dwarven work, and elves who value their lives will keep their mittens off dwarven relics.

Vigilance

Corellon still grieves for Lolth and for the sundering that divided his children. He understands the if one could be turned from his teachings, all are vulnerable to corruption. Corellon commands his servants to remain vigilant against the banished darkness. One day the drow will return from the Underdark, and when they do, the resultant war will usher in a new era of grief and hardship. Corellon warns his followers to commit their minds and bodies to beauty not out of vanity but as an effort to stave off the poison in Lolth's whispers.

The drow threat is severe enough that certain factions in Corellon's faith assume a militant cast bordering on crusading orders. The holy warriors, avengers and paladins for the most part, devote their lives to fighting Lolth and her servants. Their forays into the Underdark always carry extreme risk. Those who raid and besiege the enclaves and outposts on the drow kingdoms' borders often return maimed and scarred, when they return at all, and disfigurement is a heavy burden to bear for Corellon's adherents. These crusaders also slay spiders and demons and battle the aberrant horrors prowling the depths.

Holy Sites

In the larger cities, Corellon's holy sites can be found in most community temples where his icon or altar stands nearest to Erathis and Ioun. This arrangement may seem odd, since Corellon has few connections to these other gods. The fact is that many people see Corellon as a progressive god with an interest in civilization, culture, and prosperity. Frontier communities have a different understanding about Corellon, and include him with Avandra, Melora, and, of course, Sehanine. Rustics understand Corellon represents the beauty and wonder of the natural world and also as the bringer of Spring and slayer of Winter.

Rare is the temple dedicated exclusively to Corellon. Even in the Feywild, where he holds greater influence, he tends to share the place of honor with other members of the Seldarine: Sehanine, Fenmaril Mestarine, Shevarash of the Black Bow, Erevan Ilesere, and Hanali Celanil, among others. In the eladrin cities, his temples are grand alabaster cathedrals with minarets reaching toward the stars.

THE MISTY ISLE

Corellon's victory over Gruumsh did nothing to quash his hatred and, in fact, intensified it. Not long after Gruumsh retreated, he bargained with a kobold fiend named Kurtulmak, who had long served Tiamat as a demigod. That vile wretch revealed to Gruumsh how best to strike at Corellon and showed him the way to the Misty Isle, a place sacred to the Corellite faith. It was there that Corellon's tears (or blood) first fell to the world, and it was considered the birthplace of the elven race. Together, Gruumsh and Kurtulmak stole the island and hid it in a place none would ever find, a place so secure not even Corellon's keen elven gaze could locate it.

This petty act only inflamed the elves' hatred for orcs. Not long after, vengeful elves founded an order dedicated to recovering the Misty Isle. Centuries spent in fruitless searching has not dampened their hope of recovering this holy site. Joining the seekers is an immense honor that is extended to only the bravest and most devoted of Corellon's faithful.

In the middle world, priests honor Corellon in the many wilderness shrines raised in his name. These places are almost always found in areas of natural beauty, centered on a rock formation accentuated with flowering plants, trees, and vines. These sites always offer an excellent view of the night sky and thus include stacks, shallow caves, escarpments, and waterfalls.

Azure Guard

"Corellon warns us that the Banished Darkness will one day return. When this day comes, the enemy will find us ready, and we will throw them back into the abyss from which they came."

Prerequisite: Eladrin or elf, must worship Corellon

Lolth's return and a resumption of the disastrous war that nearly shattered the elven peoples cast a terrible shadow across Corellon's priesthood. Anticipating this event, the elders formed the Azure Guard who would one day serve as the principle leaders in repelling Lolth's demonic forces. The warriors combine prayers to Corellon with secret arcane spells to achieve the edge they need to overcome their enemies. Azure Guard members do not advertise their special status lest they invite assassins to strike at them. One cannot join the Azure Guard without invitation, and even those called to serve in its esteemed ranks may find themselves unequal to the demands the training makes.

Azure Guard Path Features

Enemy of the Darkness (11th level): You gain a +2 bonus to initiative checks, Perception checks, and saving throws against poison.

Excellence in Action (1th level): Whenever you spend an action point to make an attack, you can reroll one attack roll of that attack that misses. You must use the second result.

Shielded Teleport (16th level): Whenever you teleport, you gain a +2 bonus to AC and Reflex until the start of your next turn.

Azure Guard Powers

Banished Darkness — **Azure Guard Attack 11**

The lightest touch hurls your enemy from you to be blinded and bound by Corellon's wrath.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Divine, Teleportation
Standard Action **Melee** 1
Target: One creature
Attack: Your highest ability + 6 vs. Reflex
Level 21: Your highest ability + 9 vs. Reflex
Hit: You teleport the target up to 5 squares. The target is blinded and immobilized until the end of your next turn.
Special: If the target is a demon, drow, or spider, the target also gains vulnerability to all damage equal to your highest ability modifier until the end of your next turn.

Fury of Arvandor — **Azure Guard Utility 12**

You suffer not the hideous to live. One successful strike sets up your next attack to speed this enemy to the grave.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Divine, Teleportation
Free Action **Personal**
Trigger: You hit an enemy with an attack.
Effect: You teleport to an unoccupied square adjacent to the triggering enemy. The enemy then grants combat advantage to you until the end of your next turn.

Corellon's Azure Blessing — Azure Guard Attack 20

A blue luminescence surrounds and infuses you, revealing that you have won Corellon's favor. You can now call down the stars to smite your foes.

Daily ✦ Arcane, Aura, Divine, Radiant
Minor Action **Personal**

Effect: You activate an aura 5 that lasts until the end of the encounter or until you dismiss it as a free action. Squares in the aura are brightly lit, and any enemy that ends its turn in the aura takes 10 radiant damage. Demons, drow, and spiders in the aura grant combat advantage. While the aura is active, you can use the secondary power at will.

Secondary Power (Arcane, Divine, Radiant, Teleportation)
Standard Action **Close burst** 5
Target: One enemy in the burst
Effect: 10 radiant damage, and you knock the target prone. You then teleport to an unoccupied square adjacent to the target.

CHARACTER OPTIONS

Characters who serve Corellon have several options available to them to reinforce their devotion to the First of the Seldarine.

Paragon Paths: champion of Corellon (*Divine Power*), curseborn (*Dragon* #367), Seldarine dedicate (*Divine Power*), spiral tactician (*Martial Power*), wizard of the Spiral Tower (*Player's Handbook*)

Epic Destinies: chosen of Corellon (*Divine Power*)

Feats: Arcana Ward (*Divine Power*), Blessing of Corellon (*Divine Power*), Corellon's Grace (*Player's Handbook*), Corellon's Wrath Style (*Dragon* #373), Divine Excellence (*Divine Power*), Godsworn Sidestep (*Dragon* #384), Grasp of the Wild (*Divine Power*), Power of Arcana (*Divine Power*), Power of Skill (*Divine Power*), Power of the Wilderness (*Divine Power*)

Magic Items: *bronze griffon* (*Dragon* #384), star *of Corellon* (*Adventurer's Vault*)

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb has decided to use a different bio entry in an act of solidarity with the dwarves who object to such fawning treatment of what many of them regard as a delicate flower with a penchant for dooming entire peoples who displease him (Or is it her? One can never quite tell from the depictions). This said, Robert is entirely confident Corellon will visit no retribution, because doing so would mean he would not be able to continue contributing to your favorite game books and *DDI* articles. When not peering out to watch you from your computer screen, Robert can be found in Tennessee, scratching his head and trying to remember where he put his lunch.

Magic of Old

Bazaar of the Bizarre: Legendary Eladrin Items

By Matt Sernett
Illustration by Slawomir Maniak

Whispers of enchantment drift amid the winkling lights that float through the Feywild's ever-summer evenings. Words like birdsong lilt through the forest to perch upon the eager ears of yet another audience to stories as old as the trees under which they are told. Magic infuses eladrin, and from a people so touched by its power come many legends of objects similarly imbued. These tales are told and retold, and with each telling the luster of life returns to people, places, and things long lost to the world.

As years pass and transform into misty history, and history in turn slips into the fog of myth, the facts about such wondrous items become less clear. Yet with a race who can see so much of history pass them by and among whom memories can linger and be relived in trance, the truth might be more present than many think. Who knows when a thing thought to exist only in the mind of bards might leap into the lives of those around it as readily as any story might fire their imaginations?

Ring of Winter

Although many of the great eladrin relics of power remain unknown among other peoples, the powers of the mighty *ring of winter* make it a legendary treasure for many races. Different stories abound about the magical abilities granted to the wearer

A Magic Item's Story

The story elements presented in this article are meant to give the items some interesting context that you might use to inspire stories and adventures in your game. Feel free to change them if those stories don't fit a particular campaign or character. You could decide that several *rings of winter* exist and only one *dragon orb* was ever made. You can recast the *winged shield* as a bat-winged item made by drow. It's up to you.

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of the ring, but about two points all the tales agree: the ring has the power to usher in a time of ice, and the one who wears it will never age nor die from the passage of years.

This promise of immortality has brought lovers to blows and set nations to war. Eternal life—eternal youth should one don the ring when young—tempts even the most virtuous to madness when it seems as simple as wearing a bit of jewelry. Yet the eladrin understand the legends of the *ring of winter* better than most. They know that nothing is simple or easy when it comes to items of high magic.

According to the eladrin, the legend of the *ring of winter* wraps itself about the story of the Prince of Frost. Once a fine eladrin lord of the Summer Court, the eladrin then known as the Sun Prince fell in love with one of the Daughters of Delight, beautiful eladrin maids of another kingdom. Alas, her devotion to him faded with the season, and she came to love a mortal. The spurned Prince swore to marry her, keeping her captive if he must. She rejected his proposal of marriage and, frightened of the Sun Prince's power, the eladrin woman appealed to the Raven Queen. She prayed to the goddess who controls the destination of souls to have her spirit and that of her lover thrown forward in time to be reborn in the future. That wish was granted, and so the Prince's heart grew bitter and cold.

Many are familiar with this tale of tragic romance, yet few but eladrin know that the ring of betrothal cast away by the eladrin maid became the *ring of winter*. Its promise of an eternal summer in the warmth of the Sun Prince's love changed as the Prince's heart changed. Seeing it thus transformed, the Prince of Frost despised its icy beauty, and so the *ring of winter* was hurled into the world where it might spread among mortals some of the misery the Prince of Frost feels.

Upon donning the *ring of winter*, the wearer feels an intense chill that settles into the bones but then fades, replaced by a sense of warmth and energy. This energy is the power of the ring to prevent aging. So long as the ring's owner wears it, time cannot touch him or her. The cares of life no longer wrinkle the brow. Worry never whitens the hair. Life slides around the wearer like a gentle breeze until the ring is removed, whereupon the normal effects of life continue. Thus, a young wearer could maintain the vigor of youth, or an aged leader could retain a grip on power and gain the wisdom of centuries on the throne.

Yet for many, the promise of immortality proves hollow, for the *ring of winter* bears a peculiar curse. While worn, the weather for miles around the wearer gradually turns cold. At first, the morning frost lingers until midday. Then sleet mixes with rain. Even in high summer, the lands in which the wearer lives experience freak snowstorms. Winters grow longer. Worn too often or too long, the ring turns the wearer into a harbinger of a new age of cold and ice. For

RULES VS. STORY

When you come across an item that seems to have magical abilities that aren't described in the rules for the item, the item behaves as its rules describe. The magic item isn't required to have the specific effects described by the italicized descriptive text or the story provided for it. For example, the legendary immortality granted by the *ring of winter* might be just a legend, or it might be a real effect from which a character can benefit. Whichever it is, it doesn't directly affect play, and the DM gets to decide how or if it works. In your game, the winter brought on by wearing the ring might be a subtle effect that the PCs won't notice until months or years have passed. Alternatively, the ice age provoked by wearing the ring might arrive in a blizzard after a character wears the ring for just a few days.

Ring of Winter **Level 14+ Rare**

This glittering ring of unmelting ice shields you from cold and freezes foes around you.

Lvl 14	21,000 gp	Lvl 29	2,625,000 gp
Lvl 19	105,000 gp		
Lvl 24	525,000 gp		

Item Slot: Ring

Property: Gain resist 10 cold.
Level 19: Resist 15 cold
Level 24: Resist 20 cold
Level 29: Resist 25 cold

Power (Encounter): Immediate Interrupt. *Trigger:* You take cold damage that exceeds your resistance. *Effect:* You gain immunity to cold until the end of your next turn.

Power (Encounter ✦ Cold): Minor Action. Until the end of your next turn, enemies that end their turns adjacent to you take 5 cold damage.
Level 19: Enemies that end their turns adjacent to you take 10 cold damage.
Level 24: Enemies that end their turns adjacent to you take 15 cold damage.
Level 29: Enemies that end their turns adjacent to you take 20 cold damage.

some who seek the *ring of winter*, the price of a few seasons of wasted crops is worth the reward of extra years. For others, it would be enough to forever run before the storms, and if winter comes to grip the lands in their wake, so be it.

A barbarian warlord is the last known bearer of the ring. During one unnaturally long winter over a century ago, he conquered several human cities and a dwarven kingdom. Legends say he made a pact with the Prince of Frost to gain this good fortune. But the Raven Queen, long a rival of the Prince of Frost, cursed the Winter King so that everything he touched turned to ice. When the Winter King demanded the Prince of Frost remove the curse, he was struck down for his hubris: He and all in his kingdom were frozen solid. If such fireside stories hold some truth, the *ring of winter* might still lie in the chill grip of the Winter King.

Orb of Dragonkind

The fabled *orbs of dragonkind* dance in the dreams of dragon slayers and wyrm riders alike. Known to have been used by the eladrin of old in an ancient war with dragons, each orb can grant its wielder the power to control a dragon. Their history of doing so makes them sought after both by people who seek dominion over dragonkind and the dragons themselves.

When the world was yet young and connections between it and the Feywild first flourished, the dragons of the world gazed through the veil of magic cloaking the glittering eladrin kingdoms and saw places ripe for plunder and weak to conquest. As creatures of might and intelligence more akin to the gods than mere mortals, many dragons took it upon themselves to rule the lesser beings that scrabbled for cover at the mere shadow of their wings upon the ground, and the eladrin kingdoms of the Feywild were no exception.

As more and more dragons carved their cuts out of the world and its enchanted mirror, resentment grew. Yet how could one depose a tyrant with scales like shields and claws like spears? What could one do but cower in the face of sword-teeth and death-breath? Courage to fight the dragons came from many quarters, but no one wielded a weapon equal to the task.

The greatest eladrin wizards went into hiding across the cosmos in order to develop a magic that could turn the tide against the mighty wyrms. In flying towers shrouded by clouds and magic shadows, in iron redoubts surrounded by the searing magma of an elemental roil, in ships of gold sailing the Silver Sea, the wizards worked their magic. Some of their experiments resulted in items useful against the

dragons, others discovered new magic unrelated to their quest, and many more were found and slain by the dragons or their minions. Only one eladrin wizard, said to have been inspired by Corellon himself, managed to manifest the magic that would be the key to the dragon's undoing.

This original *orb of dragonkind* was just the first among many. Armed with many orbs, the eladrin wizards were able to turn the tide by turning the dragons upon each other. In time, some dragons even came to see the justness of the eladrins' actions and fled rather than fall amid the bones of their fellows.

The threat of the orbs brought relative peace between dragons and their lessers for many years. In time however, the riches of the dragons tempted treasure hunters, the promise of a dragon ally awakened the avarice of warlords, and the dragons sought to take the orbs for themselves. Many of the *orbs of dragonkind* were lost in struggles over their control, many more were destroyed lest they draw danger to their owners, and still others were hidden. Today the secret of their creation is a mystery, and no one knows how many *orbs of dragonkind* are scattered over the planes.

The oldest stories claim that in addition to those orbs most often wielded by the eladrin wizards there were in fact several special orbs of dragonkind, each one of a swirling hue colored in accordance with the type of dragon against which it was most effective. If true, such items would be greatly prized by dragons as a weapon against their own kind. If one could gather all such orbs together, who knows what mighty enchantments might be wrought by tapping their power?

Orb of Dragonkind — Level 12+ Uncommon

This smooth crystal orb of swirling colors can grant you the power to command dragons.

Lvl 12	+3	13,000 gp	Lvl 27	+6	1,625,000 gp
Lvl 17	+4	65,000 gp			
Lvl 22	+5	325,000 gp			

Implement (Orb)
Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d6 damage per plus, or +1d10 damage per plus against dragons.
Power (Daily ✦ Charm, Implement): Standard Action. *Attack:* Ranged 20 (one dragon); Intelligence, Wisdom or Charisma + 4 vs. Will; on a hit, the target is dominated until the end of its next turn. On a miss, you are dazed until the end of your next turn.

Red Orb of Dragonkind — Level 14+ Rare

This crystalline sphere swirls with color as if filled with roiling magma. It has the power to control red dragons.

Lvl 14	+3	21,000 gp	Lvl 29	+6	2,625,000 gp
Lvl 19	+4	105,000 gp			
Lvl 24	+5	525,000 gp			

Implement (Orb)
Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d6 damage per plus, or +1d10 damage per plus against red dragons.
Power (Daily): Minor Action. Your next attack with this implement against a dragon, if made before the end of your turn, gains a +5 power bonus to the attack roll and automatically ignores any resistance the dragon has.
Power (Daily ✦ Fire): Minor Action. The next attack you make deals fire damage in addition to its normal damage types.
Power (At-Will ✦ Charm, Implement): Standard Action. *Attack:* Ranged 20 (one red dragon); Intelligence, Wisdom or Charisma + 4 vs. Will; on a hit, the target is dominated until the end of its next turn. On a miss, you are dazed until the end of your next turn.

Green Orb of Dragonkind — Level 14+ Rare

This heavy globe of green glass contains a swirling cloud of gas. It has the power to control green dragons.

Lvl 14	+3	21,000 gp	Lvl 29	+6	2,625,000 gp
Lvl 19	+4	105,000 gp			
Lvl 24	+5	525,000 gp			

Implement (Orb)
Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d6 damage per plus, or +1d10 damage per plus against green dragons.
Property: Gain resist 10 poison.
Level 19: Resist 15 poison
Level 24: Resist 20 poison
Level 29: Resist 25 poison
Power (Daily): Minor Action. Your next attack with this implement against a dragon, if made before the end of your turn, gains a +5 power bonus to the attack roll and automatically ignores any resistance the dragon has.
Power (At-Will ✦ Charm, Implement): Standard Action. *Attack:* Ranged 20 (one green dragon); Intelligence, Wisdom or Charisma + 4 vs. Will; on a hit, the target is dominated until the end of its next turn. On a miss, you are dazed until the end of your next turn.

White Orb of Dragonkind — Level 14+ Rare

This icy orb has the appearance of a pearl the size of a goblin's head. It has the power to control white dragons.

Lvl 14	+3	21,000 gp	Lvl 29	+6	2,625,000 gp
Lvl 19	+4	105,000 gp			
Lvl 24	+5	525,000 gp			

Implement (Orb)

Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls

Critical: +1d6 damage per plus, or +1d10 damage per plus against white dragons.

Property: If while wielding this implement you are affected by an effect that would immobilize, slow, slide, push, or pull you, you may immediately make a saving throw. On a success, you are not affected by the immobilization, slowing, slide, push, or pull.

Power (Daily): Minor Action. Your next attack with this implement against a dragon, if made before the end of your turn, gains a +5 power bonus to the attack roll and automatically ignores any resistance the dragon has.

Power (At-Will ✦ Charm, Implement): Standard Action. *Attack:* Ranged 20 (one white dragon); Intelligence, Wisdom or Charisma + 4 vs. Will; on a hit, the target is dominated until the end of its next turn. On a miss, you are dazed until the end of your next turn.

Silver Orb of Dragonkind — Level 14+ Rare

This sphere of polished silver pulses with warmth and motion like a beating heart. It has the power to control silver dragons.

Lvl 14	+3	21,000 gp	Lvl 29	+6	2,625,000 gp
Lvl 19	+4	105,000 gp			
Lvl 24	+5	525,000 gp			

Implement (Orb)

Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls

Critical: +1d6 damage per plus, or +1d10 damage per plus against silver dragons.

Property: While wielding this implement, you lose all vulnerabilities to damage, and cannot gain vulnerability to any damage type.

Power (Daily): Minor Action. Your next attack with this implement against a dragon, if made before the end of your turn, gains a +5 power bonus to the attack roll and automatically ignores any resistance the dragon has.

Power (At-Will ✦ Charm, Implement): Standard Action. *Attack:* Ranged 20 (one silver dragon); Intelligence, Wisdom or Charisma + 4 vs. Will; on a hit, the target is dominated until the end of its next turn. On a miss, you are dazed until the end of your next turn.

Veil of Night

It is said that Sehanine blesses paramours and sends them shadows in which to hide their love. While many feel they have gained such a boon from the goddess, few suspect how real such blessings can be.

Once there were two lovers as star-crossed as any in the annals of eladrin romance. A young girl named Aethea married an eladrin wizard in a bond that made their families allies. At first Aethea found the wizard fascinating, and the first blush of their romance was filled with enchantment. Yet in time, the wizard retreated into his studies. Aethea, always energetic and desirous of excitement, threw herself into study of woodcraft and combat so that she might aid her two families in their ongoing war with the elves that first prompted the alliance between her house and that of her husband.

Aethea fought many battles alongside her husband, but the wizard always felt she put herself too much in harms' way, including the harm done by his own spells. Aethea took to fighting in battles distant from her spouse, and it was in one such battle that she captured a handsome elf warrior whose spirit seemed much akin to her own. The love that grew between them broke down the barriers of enmity, reason, race, and even fidelity. Yet their passion for one another surely would bring doom upon them both and perhaps set the eladrin houses at war with one another.

Sehanine, it is said, took pity upon the lovers. In Aethea she saw something of herself, and in the wizard Sehanine felt echoes of Corellon. The drama between the three people reminded Sehanine of events from the Dawn Age. Slipping a whorl of night sky free from the heavens, she wrapped it about Aethea's head and shoulders, creating the *veil of night*.

With this fabulous gift, Aethea and her lover could keep the flame of their love hidden from the enemies who would quash it.

More romantic versions of the story insist that the wizard crafted the veil for his wife and led her to believe it came from Sehanine, a sacrifice of love far stronger than she would ever know from the elf. Regardless of the veil's source, the story's tragic end is the same. The elf reveals the power of the veil to friends he trusts. The friends betray him by telling the leaders of the eladrin houses. Aethea and the elf are discovered together by parties from both houses, and in the ensuing battle, the treacherous elves escape with veil in hand. With the *veil of night* to aid them and the houses at war with one another, the eladrin houses fell.

Among eladrin today, the romance is used as a cautionary tale. Oddly to some, it's moral is not about loyalty to a spouse or the perfidy of elves. Instead it warns eladrin not to cleave too tightly to any love and to beware any gift that grants you what you most desire. It's better to care less and see clearly than allow the veil of obsession to cloud one's vision.

Veil of Night Level 18 Rare

This diaphanous cloth seems made of shadows and twinkling stars. With it you can vanish from sight.

Item Slot: Head 85,000 gp
Property: Gain a +4 item bonus to Stealth checks.
Power (Daily ✦ Illusion): Move Action. You and an adjacent ally become invisible until either of you leaves the squares you occupy or until the end of the encounter.
Power (Daily ✦ Illusion): Immediate Interrupt. *Trigger:* An enemy attacks you or an ally adjacent to you. *Effect:* The target of the triggering attack becomes invisible until the end of your next turn.

Winged Shield

The story of Mindartis and his winged shield is so famed among eladrin that many have carried his name throughout the generations. Eladrin parents name girls Mindartae in his honor, and even elves—long separated from the source of the legend—have among them the traditional names of Mindar and Minda.

Mindartis stands among the greatest heroes of eladrin legend: slayer of Death Fang, draconic terror of Blacktorn Forest; savior of Astaraython, the City Lost in Time; claimant to the Silver Throne of Sendaria who forsook the crown for love; wielder of *Epscillian*, the sword that sings when wielded by honorable hands; conqueror of Hag-Ungotha, the vile kingdom of fomorians now nothing but a ghost-haunted ruin. Yet Mindartis is as famed for how he won his glories as for the deeds themselves.

In one of his first quests, Mindartis fought and slew Thessalia, the snake-haired goddess of the Black-Tongue goblins. During the battle with this queen of medusas, Mindartis found himself transforming into stone. To prevent his death, he reluctantly called upon the favor of the Nymph Queen Vanthia, whom he had spurned. Her miraculous appearance at his call saved his life, but the kiss of the fickle fey only stopped his transformation rather than restore him. From that day forward, Mindartis had an arm of stone.

The disfigurement and his reduced ability to fight led Mindartis down a dark path of bloodshed and conquest during which *Epscillian* was silent in his hand, but the love of Jehelenna restored his goodness and honor. This eladrin maid crafted for him a *winged shield* of silver that would flit about him as he fought, defending him as if wielded by Jehelenna herself.

At some point in his many adventures, Mindartis lost his *winged shield* but regained the use of his arm. Since these events are points of high drama, their timing depends upon the teller of the tale. Regardless of the true fate of this wondrous item, a shield with wings stands as a symbol both of devotion and of redemption among eladrin. It is often worn by those seeking to redress the wrongs they have done, and a vow said to be made "beneath the wings of the shield" is meant to be an unbreakable bond.

Winged Shield Level 15 Rare

This narrow silver shield has folded mithral wings extending from each side. When released, it floats beside you and offers protection as if you wielded it yourself.

Item Slot: Arm 25,000 gp
Shield: Light
Property: You do not need to use your shield hand to gain the shield's bonus to AC and Reflex; it floats about within your reach as if you wielded it. You can use your shield hand to hold another item, climb, wield a weapon, make attacks and so on. If you have a free hand, you may count as wielding a shield as a free action. Attempts to take away the shield are resolved as if you wielded it normally.
Power (Daily ✦ Healing): Immediate Interrupt. *Trigger:* You are hit by an attack targeting AC or Reflex. *Effect:* You gain a +2 power bonus to the targeted defense for the triggering attack, and you can spend a healing surge.

About the Author

Matt Sernett is a writer and game designer for Wizards of the Coast who has worked on both the Dungeons & Dragons® and Magic: the Gathering® games. Recent credits include *Monster Vault*, *Neverwinter Campaign Guide*, *Hero Builder's Handbook*, and *Scars of Mirrodin* for Magic: the Gathering. When he's not making monsters or building worlds, he's watching bad fantasy movies you don't realize exist and shouldn't bother to learn about.

Reflavoring Powers
Customizing Your Game

By David Gibson
Illustration by Tony Foti

In my Dungeons & Dragons® home game, I play a storm druid, a primal controller who harnesses the fury of the weather to blast foes with wind and lightning. This isn't some new, unreleased build that I'm play-testing; I just reflavored my druid's powers.

Every power comes with its own fluff: a couple lines of flavor text under the power's name that describes how the power looks in action. That this text is seemingly irrelevant to the use of the power is not a flaw but a strength of the game. Players can choose how their characters' powers act, customizing each for the theme of the character or feel of the campaign. One fighter using *cleave* might strike so hard that the blow continues through one enemy into the next, but another might describe his attack hitting one target so hard that the foe is slammed into the monster standing beside (the latter fighter might change *cleave* into *Three Stooges strike*).

Reflavoring or even renaming individual powers is easy. Returning to my druid, there was no level 1 encounter power with the desired weather or storm vibe, so I turned *thorn spray* into *debris spray*. I described it as "summoning a wind to blow loose stones and detritus at my foes." Mechanically it is the same power with the same damage and same range, but it fits the character much better than the plant-based default.

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It's even possible to reflavor an entire class. Instead of a rechristening a few powers, altering a class entails changing the name and feel of every power and even a few class features. The monk class is an excellent candidate. The default monk is an East-Asian martial artist—the Shaolin monk that gave the class its name. This does not fit the feel of many European-inspired campaign settings. It's easy to re-imagine the class as a western pugilist, pulling off his doublet and rolling-up his sleeves before engaging in fisticuffs. *Crane's wings* becomes *hard right hook*, *dragon's tail* changes to *haymaker*, and the *flurry of blows* class feature is renamed *flurry to the solar plexus*.

An even more extreme example would embrace the monk's place in the psionic power source. Imagine a monk that made only soft gestures with their attacks, using telekinetic force to deliver damage instead of muscle and might. Instead of back-flipping and dashing across the battlefield, the character might float half an inch off the ground while toppling foes with a wave of the hand. This character could keep the names of powers as-is or rename them to emulate those of other psionic classes: *dancing cobra* becomes *kinetic thrust*, *drunken monkey* transitions into *hammer of the third eye*, and *flurry of blows* becomes *flurry of the mind*.

Be sure to tell your Dungeon Master what you're doing before you set about renaming all your powers and especially before the DM spends five minutes searching for your renamed power in a rulebook or the *D&D Compendium*. It only disrupts the flow of the game if you need to stop in the middle of combat to explain that your "wizard" is actually a master alchemist throwing an explosive alchemical vial in place of a *fireball*. Aalways make a note of the original name and source of the power in case you need a quick rule check.

Reflavored Races

A character's class is their primary feature, but race is the second defining element. It, too, can be easily reflavored. For the most part, the Dungeon Master establishes the flavor of races, deciding to follow the default assumptions of the published books or deviate with an alternate view of the race more suited to the campaign world. Problems can occur when a player's view of what they want the race to be differs from the DM's. One solution to this dilemma is reflavoring a race.

Uncommon races, especially those new to 4th Edition, are the most likely to cause problems. For example, the genasi are found only in the *Forgotten Realm's Players Guide*, so some DMs might decide they are inappropriate for a homebrew setting. Instead of fighting that ruling, the player could instead re-imagine the genasi into a race that does fit their DM's world or even transplant the genasi's racial abilities onto another race that the DM will allow. Perhaps the player's genasi character is instead a unique human with elemental powers related to their class, such as an earthsoul genasi warden focusing on earth powers; a windsoul genasi might be transformed into an eladrin subrace that hails from a specific part of the Feywild—the rare skystrider eladrin of the towering spire-trees of Saerlina.

Sometimes, races can also be reflavored into something that's not otherwise available in the game. This can be older material that has not yet been updated to 4th Edition—for example, a windsoul genasi being transformed into a raptoran (with *windwalker* renamed *swiftwing flight*) or an illumian customized from a half-elf (*dilettante* renamed with an appropriate illumian word). A player wishing to play a young child might opt for a halfling. Although the character is an immature human, the character uses the halfling's racial ability bonuses and racial power. *Second chance* might not be the result of a halfling's good fortune but instead the character using their misleading innocent appearance to cause an opponent to hesitate. Rename the power *deceiving appearance* and little else is required.

In the Past

Reflavoring is not a new concept, but in older editions of the Dungeons & Dragons game, it was chiefly confined to martial characters. Spell descriptions told what they did and how they looked, but melee attacks were left entirely to the Dungeon Master. A creative and quick-witted DM could turn four rounds of simple melee attacks into a wild cinematic ride with evocative descriptions of parries, thrusts, and skilled blows despite the mechanics of each attack being identical and rather bland.

Player characters could always be customized through description. Depending on how they were presented, a rogue using sneak attack might be targeting a vital area, skilfully hitting a less armoured portion of the body, or using surprise to strike the unwary. R.A. Salvatore's halfling character, Regis, is not portrayed as a deadly killer with skill or knowledge of anatomy, but in game terms is as much of a backstabbing rogue as the assassin Artemis Entreri.

The mechanics and flavor of spells were intermingled in earlier editions, and descriptions sometimes included subtle mechanical elements. A *fireball* spell would have been difficult to repurpose into an innate ability, for example, because it could be detonated early and occasionally needed to be aimed. Changing a spell into an innate ability or alchemical device could also be seen as an attempt to bypass restrictions on spell-based magic such as anti-magic fields and spell resistance.

Changing Damage

So far, we've only discussed changing descriptions and not rules. But the theme of some characters is dependent on their damage type. No matter what *lightning bolt* is called or how much it is reflavored, it will not fit the idiom of a flame wizard unless it does fire damage.

It is also possible to change the damage type of powers or feats to better fit a character—with the Dungeon Master's permission. For example, a disproportionate number of feats favor cold-using characters; changing those feats to another damage type should not automatically break the game. Such a change should not be made lightly, without considering the ramifications, and certainly not without consulting the DM.

Simply changing one damage type for another seems harmless, because the power is otherwise unaffected, but not all damage types are equal. Fire and necrotic damage are among the most resisted damage types in the game. A character who specializes in those keywords is at a small disadvantage. Other damage types, such as thunder and force, are very seldom resisted, and switching to them grants a subtle advantage. Likewise, some classes specialize in particular types of damage, so altering feats to accommodate that damage type gives those classes a slight advantage. Divine classes heavily favor radiant damage and will have a broader choice of powers that benefit from feats augmenting radiant damage attacks.

Divine classes are an interesting example, because most assume that the character follows a Good god. There are no alternate powers for clerics of Evil gods or even sinister clerics of Unaligned gods. A frequent suggestion for making an evil cleric is to swap radiant damage for necrotic damage. This puts the character at a slight disadvantage, however, especially against undead–creatures that divine characters would normally be potent against. Because undead are resistant to necrotic damage and vulnerable to radiant, evil clerics might have some problems dealing damage.

For similar reasons, keywords should be changed only with great care. Altering a Fear power to a Charm power or vice versa seems like a small change, but it does change the monsters that are affected (and unaffected) by the power. If the DM plans to use many monsters that are resistant or vulnerable to both, then making that change will have less impact on the numbers and is well worth allowing.

An Example

To illustrate how all of this works, let's look at a sample character. A solid theme is important, and I want a strong connection between race and class. I don't want a combination that already has powers designed to complement the pairing, because then I won't need to reflavor anything.

Class Feature: Minotaurs have a background tie to the demon lord Baphomet, which creates a great story hook for an infernal warlock, but no warlock powers reference the Horned King. Infernal warlocks gain the class feature *Dark One's Blessing*; this reflavors nicely to *Baphomet's Blessing*. Instead of gaining vitality from fallen enemies, the warlock might refuse to fall, ignoring wounds out of sheer, bull-headed stubbornness.

At-Will Powers: Minotaurs favor melee attacks, so it makes sense to swap *eldritch blast* for *eldritch strike* (from *Player's Handbook Heroes: Series 1*). *Eldritch strike* might be described as a magic-infused gore attack or as a weapon being surrounded in an aura resembling twin horns.

Once you start, it's tempting to reflavor everything, but if something works then leave it be. It's less to remember later, and you can focus on what doesn't work. A perfect example is *hellish rebuke*, which works perfectly with its description of anger and pain.

Encounter Power: For the level 1 encounter power, I chose *clarion call* (from *Arcane Power*) which describes "Yuri the Hunter, and the sound of his bellowing horn," a blast 3 power that does thunder damage. It effortlessly becomes *hoof of the Horned King*: "You invoke the Horned King and with a stamp of your hoof against the ground, buffet your enemies with a mighty shockwave."

Daily Power: I chose *vile brand* (from *Dragon* 382) as the level 1 daily power, mostly because minotaurs are bovines and distinguished by their brand. The name is fine, but it could also be renamed *brand of Baphomet*. Instead of just branding your enemy with a generic mark, it becomes the symbol of your patron. The power also allows the warlock to take damage on a miss in order to not expend the power. I envision this as the warlock's own brand reheating as they renew their oath of fealty to the Horned King. This doesn't just rename and reflavor the power but adds depth to the character: warlock minotaurs now show allegiance by scarring their flesh with the symbol of their master.

Utility Power: Thinking ahead to when the character hits level 2, I'm already considering *eyes of the Spider Queen*, which grants darkvision and the ability to see invisible creatures. Minotaurs of past editions did have darkvision and scent, making this power a nice throwback. I'll call it *senses of the beast*. While the power mechanically grants enhanced sight, which would go away if the character is blinded, it is an easy switch to describe it as the ability to see the invisible through an enhanced sense of smell.

About the Author

David "Jester" Gibson is an elementary school librarian and experienced amateur writer. You can find his work on his Wizards of the Coast Community site blog, the *At-Will* blog, the *Fraternity of Shadows* fansite, and the *Power Source* podcast. This is his first work for *Dragon* magazine.

Class Acts: Runepriest
Lost Runes of Unmaking

By Robert J. Schwalb
Illustration by Wayne England

"My son, we have come to the end. I can teach you no more. I release you from your apprenticeship," said the old man.

"But father, surely you have more lessons! I don't feel ready," said the young man.

"Chisel and stone, boy! What you feel is fear. Fear of the unknown. You have mastered all I—in fact, you have taught me. You will be a greater runesmith than I ever was."

The boy was silent for a time. In the dim light cast by the forge fire, the old man could see a question in the youth's eyes. His patience had limits, so the old man eventually snapped, "What? What troubles you?"

The boy looked up, eyes reflecting flames. "You have held something back."

The old man arched an eyebrow, but said nothing. It was his turn to look away.

"There is one thing you have not taught me. The rune on your hammer. I have tried to copy it. Each time, I became lost in the pattern."

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For long minutes the old man remained silent, chewing his lip, causing his beard to bristle. The boy waited.

The old man broke the silence by blowing out his breath. He fixed the boy with as serious a gaze as he could muster and said, "That, my son, is not for you. Even if I wanted to teach it to you, I couldn't."

"I don't understand."

"That is not my rune to give. Should you prove worthy, the rune will find you."

The Lattice of Heaven shattered. Divine dominions burned in the Astral Sea. Below, stars fell to earth while continents tore themselves from their foundations, some sliding into the seas while others drifted, crashing into other lands. Chaos ran unchecked and the Dawn War dimmed Creation's future. Desperate to consolidate their gains, the gods compromised their values by making alliances with their darker brethren and fielding armies of abominations to meet the elemental flood spilling into their plane. They went further, bestowing potent weapons on their servants to match those wielded by the primordials' followers. History shows the gods emerged the victors, the primordials cast down, bound in chains, and sealed away for all time. Yet the weapons and magic created were left behind, no longer needed. These tools were hidden, imprisoned, and safeguarded to prevent their exploitation by misguided mortals or other powers.

Among the many relics left from the Dawn War are the Runes of Unmaking. At one time, there were upwards of a dozen, each fabricated to contend with the elemental servants arrayed against the gods and their legions. A mortal bearing such a rune could shrug off boiling flames, withstand a hurricane, or keep his or her feet in the worst quake. The magic the runes contained could be summoned to lend incredible power to the wielder's attacks, power enough to shatter mountains and part seas. As with other weapons from these ancient times, the runes proved too dangerous for mortals to wield, so the gods sought to undo their creation. But the runes proved too powerful for even divine hands to undo, and so it was decided that they would be hidden in the most forlorn places, their names erased from the histories, and their wielders recalled to live out their days under the gods' watchful eyes. For centuries, the Runes of Unmaking have lain dormant, nearly forgotten, lost to the world and the planes, and even to the gods' own memories. Such power, however, rarely stays hidden for long.

Runes of Unmaking

Four major runes are described in this article, each demonstrating one technique the gods used to overcome their elemental enemies. One does not just buy a Rune of Unmaking; each must be found and mastered, usually as a reward from completing a quest. Once acquired, the rune is an alternative reward (see *Dungeon Master's Guide 2*), much like a divine boon.

Rune of Fiery Might

The rune unfurls into a fiery line that reaches out to burn you. Yet when it touches your flesh, you are not scorched. Instead, you feel your fury rise, inflamed by the rune's potent magic.

The Rune of Fiery Might finds its origins in a deadly contest between Moradin and Imix. The Elemental Prince of Fire, bound as he was to Tharizdun, threw his forces against the god of the forge at the Battle of Nine Peaks. Moradin smote the corrupted primordial, casting the squirming prince down to the Elemental Chaos where he would later be bound in adamantine chains. As he fell, the primordial's ichors etched a blazing rune into Moradin's hammer, a rune that later flared with dread power whenever the god gave into his wrath. Moradin controlled the rune's fury, and bestowed its knowledge on his prized followers with great reluctance—for though the rune offered great power, it could also poison its wielder's soul.

Gaining the Rune

The Halls of Agrandor grace one of the first fastnesses raised by the dwarven lords of old. The fortress city withstood invasion by orcs, sieges by giants, and arson by the hated dragon Ichendethé. So strong proved this fortress, the Acolytes of Stone and Steel chose the site to inter Rothgen, a famed runepriest who was the last to master the Rune of Fiery Might. They sealed away their fallen hero deep in a vault protected by devoted homunculi and cunning traps, certain none would disturb the runepriest's rest.

The world turned and an age died. Spriggan invaders drove the complacent and greedy dwarves out and laid claim to the cavernous halls, polluting them with their filthy presence. The invaders have ventured into the deep chambers, drawn by the rune's whispers, though none have found the hiding place and returned to tell about it. But it is just a matter of time before the spriggans overcome the defenders and plunder these most sacred vaults.

Rune of Fiery Might Level 19 Rare

Summoning the rune's magic causes liquid fire to fill its etchings until they blaze with brilliant light.

Alternative Reward: Lost Rune 105,000 gp

Property: Whenever you would enter a new rune state, you can enter the rune state of fiery might instead. While in this state, when you hit with an attack, enemies adjacent to you take 10 fire damage.

Power (Daily ✦ Fire, Teleportation): Immediate Interrupt. *Trigger:* You are hit by an attack. *Effect:* Each enemy adjacent to you takes 10 fire damage. You then teleport up to 5 squares.

Rune of Stone Eternal

The granite slab bears a strange runic marking. This mark is not chiseled, but rather appears to be a pattern in the stone itself. Touching the rune, you feel strange power flow into you, a sudden strength and resilience unlike anything you have known.

Stolen from the Lattice of Heaven by primordial forces in the Dawn War's earliest phase, this rune's theft unraveled the divine plan for a unified heaven and changed history's course forever. The Rune of Stone Eternal was a mystical glyph that gave the Lattice strength enough to bind the different dominions. Though removed from its original purpose, the Rune of Stone Eternal offers incredible strength to those who master its power.

Gaining the Rune

The Stone King, called the Living Rock by his giant underlings, is nearly forgotten in the modern era. He once ruled the distant Skyclaw Peaks, now a line of weathered, tree-covered mountains in the far west. Legends of the king's identity abound; some claim he was a goliath chieftain, others a stone giant despot, and still others believe he was a fierce primordial sired by First Creator Annam. Whatever the truth, the tales agree that the Stone King had a palace on a mountain aerie, reached by a perilous road that wound up into the jagged peaks. According to goliath tribesmen who claim descent from the ancient monarch, it toppled into a mountain valley some two centuries ago, where its shattered remains can still be found.

While the lands are littered with similar wreckage and half-remembered legends, what makes the Stone King so interesting is that the tyrant lived for several centuries, if the old tales can be believed. The source of this remarkable longevity was his throne. It was a massive thing, made from solid granite, rough and unworked. So long as the Stone King sat upon the throne, no weapon could harm him and no poison could sicken him. The throne was even rumored to hold time at bay. The goliaths claim the throne's power sourced from a strange pattern in its back, a complex rune placed there in ancient days by the gods as a promise. While the rune endured, the gods would maintain the prisons that ensured the world would be free from future contests between elemental and divine.

Rune of Stone Eternal Level 20 Rare

You awaken the ancient rune to gird yourself in divine power.

Alternative Reward: Lost Rune 125,000 gp

Property: Whenever you would enter a new rune state, you can enter the rune state of stone eternal instead. While in this state, you gain resist 10 to all damage.

Power (Daily): Immediate Interrupt. *Trigger:* You are hit by an attack. *Effect:* You turn to stone until the start of your next turn. While turned to stone, you cannot move, you take a -5 penalty to all defenses, and you gain resist 30 to all damage.

Rune of Storm Unabated

Lightning slashes through the heavens, thunder booms all around. For a moment, in the afterglow of the sudden light, you think you see an unexpected pattern.

There are storms and then there is *the* storm. After the Lattice of Heaven fell into ruin, Kord descended from the heavens to hunt down the primordials' servants in the Elemental Chaos. Wrath blinded him to the risks and the destruction he wrought, for he would leave no mountain intact in his searching. Before he could cause too much trouble, the dreaded slaad lord Ygorl confronted the god. The two fought to a standstill, for the closer the Lord of Entropy moved to the beginning of time, the more powerful he became. No strike the battle god made could slow Ygorl's ravenous scythe. Kord knew he faced certain doom standing alone against the slaad's horrid might. With one mighty roar, he leapt up into the heavens, masking his retreat with a boiling storm which blocked any pursuit.

Gaining the Rune

This divine storm has never dispersed, lingering even now, growing and shrinking with the god's ferocious temper. The storm captured the god's voice and gave it form as a rune, visible only when the storm's lightning strikes an elemental creature. Many of Kord's servants crusade into the Elemental Chaos in hopes of witnessing the holy tempest and, in doing so, earn the magnificent rune said to contain a fragment of the battle god's vast power.

Rune of Storm Unabated Level 16 Rare

Sparks fly from the rune when you access its power and thunder growls in your footsteps.

Alternative Reward: Lost Rune 45,000 gp

Property: Whenever you would enter a new rune state, you can enter the rune state of storm unabated. While in this state, your runepriest at-will attack powers deal 2d6 extra lightning and thunder damage.

Power (Daily ✦ Lightning, Thunder): Standard Action. *Attack:* Area burst 1 within 5 (creatures in the burst); +19 vs. Reflex. *Hit:* 10 lightning and thunder damage, and the target is dazed until the end of your next turn.

Rune of Tide Inexorable

The murky waters boiled and seethed, a frothing mass heralding the island's rise. Breaking the unruly seas, a dark obelisk stood upon a filthy black island nearly a mile across. Kelp clung to the rock as if in modesty, dripping with noisome brown slime. Through the mess shone a silvery rune. All who beheld the rune felt pulled to it, to bathe in its unwholesome light.

The chains binding the fallen primordials owe their creation to Moradin's forge and Kord's strength, yet not all the Dawn Titans were bound by these champions. The gods shackled their foes through various means; by forcing them from this reality altogether, their names erased from history's annals, or using the world itself to confine the tempestuous monsters. When Melora defeated Cryonax to gain mastery of the waves, slaughtering his demonic and elemental servants that sailed the frozen northern seas, she plunged the primordial into a deep trench and sealed him beneath her great stone shield. The rune adorning her shield holds Cryonax imprisoned. Though it cannot be removed, the sigil may lend its power to a worthy champion.

Gaining the Rune

The rune holding Cryonax's vault closed weakens. From time to time the prison rises from the deeps—breaking the waves and floating, a sinister island—only to sink once more, leaving a noxious stench, black ice, and an oily smear to mark its passage. The vault rose not long ago and was discovered by the dragon Veng, who proved unprepared for the entrapped primordial's influence. The utterly mad dragon lairs on the island, using it as a base to launch strikes against passing ships and nearby coastal villages. All the while, the rune on the obelisk at the island's center shines with a baleful light, awaiting a hero to take its power and send the island back to the depths.

Rune of Tide Inexorable Level 17 Rare

Calling upon the silvery blue rune, you hear distant, crashing waves as its power suffuses you.

Alternative Reward: Lost Rune 65,000 gp

Property: Whenever you would enter a new rune state, you can enter the rune state of tide inexorable instead. While in this state, you can choose to be immune to forced movement. In addition, whenever you are slowed or immobilized by an effect that a save can end, you can immediately make a saving throw to end that effect.

Power (Daily): Minor Action. *Effect:* Close burst 3 (creatures in the burst). You push each target up to 3 squares. *Aftereffect:* Close burst 5 (creatures in the burst). You pull each target up to 3 squares.

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb is one of the world's most interesting people. When he's not traveling the world, fighting crime and impressing the ladies, he blows into his office in Tennessee where he rattles off a few words that mysteriously make themselves into books and articles for your reading pleasure. A discerning reader might find his name in some one hundred fifty books and articles he's produced for games such as Dungeons & Dragons®, *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*, *A Song of Ice and Fire RPG*, *Star Wars RPG*, and the *d20 system*. If you remain unconvinced, you ought to take a look at *Monster Manual 3*, *Player's Handbook 3*, and *Martial Power 2*. He's in there. Promise.

Unearthed Arcana: The Awakened Psion

By Peter Schaefer and Robert J. Schwalb
Illustration by Craig J. Spearing

The methods used to gain psionic energy might be similar from one psion to another, but how they manifest the energy varies a great deal between the competing orders and philosophies found in the world. Telekinesis and telepathy are the dominant methods, but those broad categories encompass many "sciences" taught within the different psionic institutions. In effect, these foci represent aggregates of different approaches to and techniques for mastering what some call psionic magic. In simpler terms, a science is composed of several disciplines united under a single theme that is pioneered by a psion from the past and taught to each succeeding generation, or that is uncovered through painstaking research and meditation.

The powers described in *Player's Handbook 3* are not just the most common, but also the most acceptable disciplines known in the world. They only scratch the surface of what psions can achieve. Whole worlds of thought exist within the psionic community on the ways in which even time and space can serve the individual mind. One such trend—a relatively recent one—is adhered to by those who take the best telepathic concepts and push against their limits. They venture beyond the accepted methods into proscribed territory, where new expressions and avenues for channeling the mind's energy can be explored. Most telepaths favor disciplines that allow *contact* with some other individual. Through contact, the psion can manipulate another's emotions, sensations, and even thoughts. Such connections are short-lived—a mere touch. Long-standing wisdom and experience among those who practice the psionic art holds that prolonged contact with another mind invites a serious danger to the psion's mental state. Deeper contact can result in an inadvertent merging of consciousness. Anyone who has seen the effect of such "personality pollution" tends to heed the warnings against extensive invasion into a single mind.

The "awakened," as they call themselves with no small pride, ignore or entirely reject these prohibitions. They push deep into other minds, where they let their own thoughts take root until their perceptions merge with the subject's. Doing so frees the psion's thoughts from the confinement of their own skulls and lets them sense the world, on a temporary basis, through another.

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Apologists downplay the danger this practice poses, but there are genuine long-terms risks associated with this technique. Psions who dabble too much in this science might be polluted by their foes. When they retreat to their own minds, they might drag back memories, emotions, and urges not their own. An awakened psion must be vigilant against these external influences and recognize them for what they are. Those who lapse can find other personalities taking root and causing irrevocable personality changes that frequently end in tragedy.

Even the cautionary examples of psions who crippled their minds with personality intrusions are not enough to keep all psions on guard against personality pollution. Some psions take few if any precautions, or even welcome contamination for the insights it brings. They object to the notion that psychic scraps slowly drive a person insane. Quite the opposite; they claim that the merging of many personality fragments slowly transforms them into something greater than themselves. They see the world from multiple perspectives, through other beings' filters, and open their minds wide to accept the secret truths that are denied to others.

This is an extreme view. It is possible to take psychic risks while dipping into another's mind without stripping oneself bare of defenses. The benefits vary: insights into an opponent's mind can reveal secret caches of loot, passwords, trade secrets, and personal information useful for bluffs, bribes, and blackmail. The risk can be reduced, but it can never be eliminated. Awakened psions accept the risk routinely, while more cautious types only nibble at the edges without ever taking a full bite.

Rewards

The awakened cast their minds deep into the minds of their foes to ensure their effectiveness—at the risk of mental contamination. Any psion can use these techniques, but they are favored by those who focus on telepathy.

Before you make an attack roll for a psion attack that targets Will, you can choose to *delve* into the mind of your target. If your attack hits, in addition to the normal effect, you can draw information from the target's mind. Choose one of the following:

- **Borrow Sight**: In addition to your own sight, you see all creatures and objects the target can see, from the target's position. You can determine line of sight and line of effect for ranged psionic attacks from your space or the target's space. This effect lasts until the end of your next turn.
- **Learn Intentions**: You learn the target's likeliest reaction to the current tactical situation. The DM decides and divulges to you what actions the target will take on its next turn, given the information it has. Should the situation change significantly, the target might take a different action.
- **Plant Thought**: You leave one of your thoughts or feelings in the target. This thought is not strong enough to control the target, but it can change the target's actions in subtle ways. The belief that reinforcements will arrive at any moment might keep a monster from fleeing; the thought that an enemy is just one wound away from collapsing (when in fact he is the strongest member of the party) can change a monster's plan of attack. How the implanted thought affects the target is up to the DM. The more believable the thought is, the more likely it is to be believed.
- **Sample Personality**: You delve deeper and snatch tidbits from the target's mind and memory, determined by the DM. These can include useful information such as secret handshakes or code words, who has a key to the vault, or personal data such as the target's name, ambitions, and what it actually thinks of its master. Having this information might grant bonuses to social or other skill checks, at the DM's discretion.
- **Shared Kinesthesia**: You share the target's awareness of its body and location. You ignore any concealment or total concealment the target has until the end of your next turn.
- **Skim Mind**: You learn the target's thoughts and emotions, determined by the DM. These tend to be surface thoughts (no one thinks deeply in the middle of a fight). They might be immediately useful, such as which squares not to step on or which direction reinforcements are approaching from. Or they might be dramatically interesting, such as the enemy's anxiety over losing a lucky talisman just before the fight or intense fear of not stopping the intruders, because of what the master does to those who fail.

Dangerous Delving

Some forms of delving bear greater risk than those above. When you choose to delve, you can choose from among the following options instead of the above options, but there is a price to pay. If your attack hits, choose one of the following.

- **Detect Weakness**: You gravitate toward the target's greatest fears and insecurities and exploit them. Your attack deals +1d10 extra damage per tier. This requires that you identify with the target's self-perceived weaknesses and increases the potential baggage you carry back to your own mind.
- **Foster Insecurity**: You leave behind new fears and insecurities designed to grow into full-fledged self-doubt before the target's next action. The target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls until the end of your next turn. Such doubt must be transplanted healthy from rich soil—your own true fears are all that will do, giving the target's mind more dangerous exposure to yours.
- **Manipulate Muscles**: You impose some of your own muscle memory and reflexes over the target's. Until the start of your next turn, the target cannot shift—the conflict over which muscles do what is too great for so careful an act. The process of merging such fundamental an aspect of yourself opens your mind to danger.
- **Unnerving Duplication**: You superimpose your own sense of self over the target's. It lasts long enough to ensure that the target takes a -5 penalty on attack rolls against you until the start of your next turn and then evaporates. Even so, sharing something so personal with a stranger in mind-to-mind contact is not healthy.

It bears repeating that **the decision to delve, or to delve deeply, must be declared before you make the attack roll**. If you forget to make this declaration before the die hits the table, then you did not delve.

Critical Success

An awakened psion can always sense more of the target mind while delving. It is a murky lake, full of mysterious and intriguing objects just out of reach or out of sight, like a massive shadow. On a critical hit, the awakened psion discovers that the lake is clear and everything is hers to explore and manipulate. She has cast herself into the very center of the target's mind. At such a time, the target's mind is laid bare to you. In addition to encouraging the DM to be generous with the results of your delve, you can also dominate the target until the end of your next turn.

Risks

All of this power comes at a price.

- When you choose to delve and you roll a natural 1, your delve goes wrong. The sensations, memories, and emotions native to the target's mind overwhelm the psion.
- When you delve and roll a critical hit, the target's mind is clarified in a way that invites dangerous overindulgence.
- When you perform dangerous delving, if your attack hits and the d20 result is odd, you have overexposed your mind.

When any of these mishaps occur, you have been contaminated. If the attack had multiple targets, multiple mishaps can occur. Roll a d20 to determine how you handle each psychic misstep.

CONSEQUENCES OF DELVING

d20	Consequence
20	You feel dizzy, but there are no serious adverse effects.
16-19	Until the end of your next turn, you are dazed and the target can see through your eyes.
11-15	The target learns something from the surface of your mind, determined by the DM. This is often relevant to the current situation, such as what powers you have available or what magic items you're considering using. Cooperate with the DM when asked about your immediate intentions.
6-10	The target learns something from your memory or about your personality, determined by the DM. This might be relevant to the current situation, such as what powers you have available; longer-term, such as where your party calls home; or personal, such as your childhood nickname or that you hunt for your parents' murderer. You do not know what information the target has received.
2-5	Some of the target's memories or personality overwrite your own, as determined by the DM. Memories typically overwrite similar memories: You might believe you came from the target's hometown or married the target's spouse, or the layout of your actual home might look foreign to you. Personality traits are additive: You might acquire the target's ambition to become chief of the hobgoblins, its fear of demons and spiders, or its prejudice against humans (or your own race), while retaining your natural inclinations.
1	As above (2-5). In addition, you briefly share all the target's goals and intentions. You might even believe that you are the target. The DM controls your character until the end of your next turn with this in mind.

DUNGEON MASTER'S GUIDELINES

This system calls for some DM adjudication. It has to be that way because of the many effects that are governed by character and story rather than combat mechanics. As a general rule, when a delve succeeds, provide the player with an interesting tidbit of information that adds some depth to the world. If the player thinks of a creative way to use this information to the party's advantage, even better. When the player succeeds on a delve with an exciting roll—17 to 19, perhaps—then share out something grander, something you think is more valuable, more private to the subject, and easier for the party to take advantage of. Finally, on a critical hit, try to give the player exactly what you think he or she is looking for. After all, they're paying for it.

When deciding the worst effects of a delve gone wrong, aim for story significance, not petty difficulty. It's interesting to lose the memory of a brother, best friend, childhood nickname, or hometown. It's only frustrating to lose the memory of the party's hireling such that the psion takes damage every time he goes to get 50' feet of rope from the group pack. Likewise, gaining the personality trait "I don't use magic" or something equally debilitating is obnoxious. Choose instead something that comes into play while the group is exploring social or story situations, not during combat (or at least not *often* during combat).

The DM can select any effect bound to a result higher than the one you roll.

Dissonance

The consequences to delving may seem light. Some treat them so, accepting their altered minds as the natural result of expanding awareness. Those who struggle against them, intentionally or through subconscious association with the lost traits, suffer.

When you act according to a memory you have lost, or when you act against a personality trait you have gained (but not one you developed naturally), you suffer mental dissonance and take psychic damage equal to your healing surge value. If you acquire the long-term goal of placing Tiamat on a throne above other gods yet you participate in casting down her altars, you will feel pain as two parts of your mind struggle against each other.

These gained or altered traits never return to normal. Muscle memory of the layout of one's bedroom can redevelop over time, but those memories are being made anew. If the memory of your first kiss is wiped out by the evil sorcerer's similar memory with an evil first girlfriend, yours is gone from your mind. Only powerful mind magic beyond the grasp of modern mortals could return it, and that, too, has a price. Likewise, new personality traits never fade.

After enough adventuring, most awakened psions have at least one pair of conflicting traits and risk experiencing dissonance. The danger in doing anything increases exponentially as the number of conflicting factors increases. These are all additive: When you betray more than one delving-gained trait at a time, you take the damage from dissonance for each trait that is in conflict. When you have no choice but to betray one new trait or another, you are guaranteed to take damage.

Consider Phli Bos, one of the awakened who finds himself in a bind. While delving too deeply in a kobold's mind, he came out with a sincere belief that dragons are godly beings who must be worshipped. Later, when dealing with an errant knight who was in his way, Phli picked up a certainty that dragons are a scourge to be destroyed. Normally, these don't bother Phli much, because he doesn't spend much time thinking about dragons. But today, one is perched right in front of him, and he faces a choice: treat it as majesty, try to wipe it out, or disobey both personality fragments and do his own thing, such as treating it as an equal. Choosing option one or two gives him psychic damage from dissonance. Option three gives him twice as much psychic damage, because Phli suffers dissonance with two personality traits instead of just one.

It is this inevitability that destroys all awakened sooner or later. Every psion who delves without extreme prejudice will one day break down into a shattered mirror of stolen memories and partial personalities. They are dangerous and unpredictable characters.

The Distilled Dream

Practitioners of psionic magic who care about the public image of their art shun awakened psions. The Distilled Dream is a loose association of ardents, battleminds, and psions who hunt and put down awakened madmen.

A similar organization, Of the Stained Glass, consists of awakened psions who believe they can control their minds and must end the misery of any who cannot.

Shardminds inhabit both groups in unusually large numbers. There is a whispered belief that the awakened might have keys to the Living Gate's reconstruction, or its final destruction. Some shardminds hunt mad psions in the hope that they will find such knowledge in an awakened and shattered mind. Others believe that the dissolution of the mental boundaries between souls weakens the border between the world and the Far Realm. Still others think it might strengthen that boundary.

Among the awakened themselves, there is a persistent rumor-cum-legend regarding an awakened psion who serves one of the gods—some say Ioun, some say Vecna or Torog—and who suffers no ill effects from her delving. Any traces of her targets' minds that return with her are stored in a crystal she wears around her neck, a personality fragment or memory imprisoned safely away from her consciousness. When the crystal prison fills, say the stories, she fuses the mental rubble into a whole and wholly mad mind and creates a body for it to wear—or perhaps she gives it to her god for that entity's use.

Caveat Emptor

Players, know what you are getting into when you choose to play an awakened psion. You will be one of the most flexible mental magicians in the game, stealing information, leaving lost thoughts in enemies. You will know many secrets and dangle many minds from your puppeteer's strings.

You will also someday implode. If you are unlucky, you will plummet from the lofty state of a pristine and controlled mind to the chaos of a mind with a thousand visitors and no one to mop up their muddy footprints. With better fortune, you will keep your growing inconstancy in check for a longer period—but you will one day snap.

Play the awakened psion when you want to act out enemies' whims from time to time, and when you appreciate gaining and playing with strange quirks of character. You can't be afraid of losing control of your character, because the DM will sometimes decide what your character does, and other times remind you of a foreign influence that you must obey or suffer the consequences.

Most importantly, be satisfied with a glorious, chaotic, broken-minded end to your character, whenever it should come. Because one day, your character will become unplayable. Look forward to it.

UNEARTHED ARCANA

This is an "Unearthed Arcana" article, which means that it is an unofficial variant for the Dungeons & Dragons game. You won't find these options in the *D&D Character Builder*, the *D&D Compendium*, or any printed rulebooks. If you'd like to use these awakened psion rules for your character, be sure to discuss it in advance with your DM and get his or her OK.

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb is an award-winning game designer who has contributed design to or developed over one hundred role-playing game titles for Dungeons & Dragons®, *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay, A Song of Ice and Fire RPG, Star Wars RPG,* and the *d20 system*. Some of his more recent work for Wizards of the Coast can be found in *Player's Handbook 3, Martial Power 2,* and *Draconomicon 2: Metallic Dragons*. In addition, he's a regular contributor to both *Dragon* and *Dungeon* magazines. Robert lives, works, and will probably die in Tennessee.

Peter Schaefer beats Rob Schwalb alphabetically by a hair. In fact, he does all things alphabetically. He doesn't get up in the morning; he Ascends from Bed, then Continues Downstairs to Eat. It's not easy, but hey, you gotta be crazy somehow. For years, Peter has artfully been contributing design to every freakin' game he can imagine: D&D, *Exalted, Scion, World of Darkness* games, and so on. It's just killer, man.

Born Under a Violent Moon

Shifters in the Forgotten Realms

By Matt Sernett
Illustration by Jeffrey Koch

The pulse quickens. Breath comes fast and heavy. Vision sharpens. The body reacts before the mind comprehends. In the long moments of the chase, hunter and hunted share the same spirit. No matter how learned or civil, both become beasts. But one mouth slavers while the other becomes dry. Both run toward life, but at chase's end, only one still breathes.

Shifters understand the beast within better than most. Descended from the union of true lycanthropes with humans, elves, and their ilk, shifters often feel the pull of the moon in their blood, ebbing and flowing like ocean tides. Their ambiguous heritage and wild souls have kept shifters on the fringes of civilization for centuries, but the Spellplague threw wilderness and city alike into chaos. Now shifters are as common as humans in some parts of the Realms, and a few brave examples venture forth into the wider world, trying to find hope in the points of light that dot the wide darkness of the wild lands.

Shifter Backgrounds

Below are several regions in the Forgotten Realms where shifters are found. Use the backgrounds, questions, and suggestions in the entries to inspire your shifter PC. When creating a shifter character, you may select the normal regional benefit for your background or the alternate shifter regional benefit for that region.

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Baldur's Gate

Baldur's Gate bustles with lively trade, and its people go about their daily lives with the self-satisfied expressions of contented citizens. But a threat lurks in the shadows of a nearby forest. Once, beasts and blood ran in the Baldur's Gate streets, and the city came within a whisker of being ruled by the moon-cursed. Grand Duke Valarken recently attempted a coup, backed by the werewolves of the Band of the Red Moon, but his defeat sent them all back to the Werewoods, the forest you called home. You don't know the Duke's fate, but you do know the Band of the Red Moon has grand designs on the region.

You come from Vehlarr, an ancient territory that has become legend. Established centuries ago by its elf werewolf ruler, this city of lycanthropes, elves, and shifters floats in time and space, an effect created by Selûne long before the Spellplague. Now it appears only under the full moon, existing both in the Werewood and the Feywild, forming an unstable bridge between planes. Though centuries have passed since its unmooring in the world, Vehlarr has felt only 75 years of that time.

You grew up in Vehlarr, feeling the erratic influence of both worlds. When you learned of the Band of the Red Moon's expansion plans, you felt you had to help. You disregarded the warnings of your leaders and left, but you waited too long. By the time you reached Baldur's Gate, the Band of the Red Moon had come and gone. Now you can't return home for fear of the welcome you'll get from the werewolves. And their anger at your betrayal will remain fresh for a very long time.

Baldur's Gate Shifter Regional Benefit

Add History to your class skill list. You gain a +2 bonus to History checks. Add Elven to your list of known languages.

When not shifting, you resemble an elf, not a human. Your face lacks hair, and your skin tone is within the elven range. If you are not shifting, this resemblance allows you to pass as elven with a successful Bluff check against a creature's passive Insight. If someone makes an active Insight check against you, your Bluff check to disguise your shifter nature suffers a –5 penalty.

The Dalelands

A shepherd looks to the rising moon and begins to urge his flock home, despite the hours of summer sun that remain in the day. A farmwife scans the pale dirt road as it winds into the forbidding wood, waiting for someone who will never return. A man stops dead in his tracks, then heads home at a run after seeing bits of blood and fur on a neighbor's doorframe. Such is life in the Dalelands, particularly in Daggerdale.

Surrounded by hilly forests and rocky, mazelike canyons, the citizens of isolated Daggerdale live in fear of werecreatures striking their villages in the night. The dale has never been a place friendly to outsiders, and shifters are viewed with particular suspicion. Strangers could be lycanthropes in disguise, and the folk of Daggerdale have little doubt that shifters run with the monsters that infest the craggy heights of the Dagger Hills.

You are a shifter related to the lycanthropes that plague the dale. Perhaps you grew to hate the leaders of your kind after witnessing too much wanton slaughter. Maybe you were exiled, lacking your tribe's hunger and rage. Or perhaps you fled the area after seeing one of your kind captured and killed by the people of Daggerdale.

Dalelands Shifter Regional Benefit

Add Stealth and Nature to your class skill list. While shifting, you gain a +2 bonus to Intimidate checks.

Dambrath

If the shifter race has a homeland in the Realms, it might be the dry plains of Dambrath in the Scarred South. Before the Spellplague, Dambrath was a land of barbaric humans enslaved by the Crinti, a half-drow elite. During the Spellplague, the humans turned to emergent primal powers and lycanthropes that resembled their old tribal totems to drive out the Crinti. Today, shifters are common among Dambrath's nomadic tribes, sharing tents and horselines with their human cohorts. Shifters are thought to be blessed by Malar, bestial exarch of the Dambrathan's patron deity, Silvanus.

You come from one of Dambrath's famous nomadic tribes. They say Dambrathans are born ahorse, and your skills with a mount lend proof to the adage. What is your tribe's totem? Were any natural lycanthropes in your tribe? How peaceful or brutal were your people, and why have you ranged so far from them?

Dambrath Shifter Regional Benefit

While you are riding a creature, you can reroll any Acrobatics, Athletics, Endurance, or Stealth check using the creature's skill check bonus rather than your own. You must use the second result.

Durpar

The near-forgotten land of Durpar cowers in the shadow of the Beastlands, harboring horrors within its borders. Goblin patrols roam the streets of its only city, Vaelan, where monstrous emissaries of the Beast Lords come to play at diplomacy. Meanwhile, the grassy hills and tumbled ruins of Old Vaelan hide a deadly secret: A creature dwells in the ruined dungeons, served by lycanthropes and other deadly creatures. This being, known only as the Whispering One, has demanded sacrifices from Durpar's chakas. Some of those the merchant cabals sacrificed were humans, and the Whispering One saw fit to gift some of them to his servants.

You were born of a union between a servant of the Whispering One and its human chattel. Your parents kept you hidden for as long as they could, shielding you from the dark secrets of the catacombs, but they couldn't hide you forever. Finally, they sent you as far away as they could. How young were you when you left? Perhaps your parents were kind to you, but how "good" were they?

Durpar Shifter Regional Benefit

You can reroll any Dungeoneering check, but you must use the second result. Add Goblin to your list of known languages.

The Great Dale

At the full moon, wolves gather outside the village of Bezentil in the Great Dale and howl at the night sky. Soon, travelers through the Dale are plagued by wolves. How can the people "protected" by the druids of the Circle of Leth not suspect what they pay for the privilege? Do they truly not realize the druids themselves paw the earth outside Bezentil?

You were born into a semi-nomadic tribe of shifters that roams the Forest of Lethyr. Your tribe is old, and its origin is shrouded by the mysteries of the Circle's cult. Your people keep to themselves and avoid the elves of the forest. Folk outside the Great Dale don't even know your tribe exists. Why did you leave your homeland? Were you exiled for looking too closely into the activities of the druids? Did you flee after becoming entangled with the forest elves? Did the druids of the Circle of Leth send you on a mission?

Great Dale Shifter Regional Benefit

You can reroll any Nature check, but you must use the second result. Add Elven to your list of known languages.

Luruar

Lurar, or the Silver Marches, is a safe and friendly place to visit. Its well-maintained cities welcome all who seek respite or a new start in the world, if they hold justice in their hearts. But you know that reputation to be a lie. You are one of the "skin-changers" known to haunt the eastern portions of the Glimmerwood. You are of the People of the Black Blood.

This loose collection of shifter tribes and lycanthropes has stalked the area formerly known as the Moonwood since long before the Spellplague. Malar was their patron god, and they remain devoted to him as the exarch of Silvanus. Many of the smaller tribes, particularly those populated by wereboars and werewolves, still take captives and make sacrifices to Malar in bloody rites. Others have come to take a broader view, and while Beastlord worship forms the basis of their lives, there are times when their existence is not devoted to savagery. Growing up, you came to take pleasure in these moments, and eventually sought out the famed hospitality of Luruar in the hopes of learning more about another way of life. Your attempt did not go smoothly, and you found yourself rejected both by the People of the Black Blood and by the citizens of the city. Clearly, you had to forge your own path.

Luruar Shifter Regional Benefit

You add Chondathan to your list of languages known, you add Intimidate to your class skills list, and you gain a +2 bonus to Perception while you are shifting.

Luskan

Luskan is described by its inhabitants as the armpit of the world, and you can attest to that truth. Your life began in Luskan's sewers, and for years you followed in the footsteps of the wererats and shifters that made up your extended "family." Nothing good came of this pitiful life of foulness and violence. In fact, things seemed to get worse every year. If your clan wasn't battling Shou pirates or running from undead, it was squabbling over the meager scraps left by the beggars and criminals Luskan calls citizens.

You knew you had to get out, but it's never easy to leave home behind—especially when you're enmeshed in a criminal underworld. But a hard life has taught you hard lessons, and you shared what you learned with whomever got in your way. What was life like for you in Luskan? Did you live only in the sewers, or did you find shelter among the surface gangs? A Shou crime syndicate infiltrates the city's powerful—did you learn your trade from them? Perhaps you have some exotic skills gained through association with foreign pirates.

Luskan Shifter Regional Benefit

You can reroll any Stealth check, but you must keep the second result. Add Shou to your list of known languages.

Moonshae Isles

The Moonshae Isles hold many dangers, but few are so openly threatening as the island of Moray. Giants make dens in the island's mountains, and a few orc tribes scuffle in the peaks' shadows, but the Norlander villages huddle close to the island's coasts in fear of the Black Blood lycanthropes. This tribe was once connected to the People of the Black Blood, but Malar's demotion and the tribes' great physical separation led to division. Now, the terror of Moray's coastal villages comes to the rest of the Moonshaes, as the Black Blood's weres and shifters take longships on savage raids to the other islands.

Your kind is hated and feared in the Moonshae Isles. How did you come to be on the continent? Perhaps you were shipwrecked and helped by someone ignorant of the dangers of Moray. Maybe you stole a ship and sailed to Amn, hoping to escape your violent home. Or you might have been left behind on your first raid, stranded when your allies left or were defeated.

Moonshae Isles Shifter Regional Benefit

Add Athletics to your class skill list. You gain a +3 bonus to Athletics checks made to swim, and to any skill or ability check related to piloting water vessels or to moving around on a boat. Add Chondathan to your list of known languages.

Rashemen

Rashemen is a land of stories. Village elders draw children close to the fire, not with legends of faraway lands or ancient heroes, but of dark threats that lurk under the bridge just up the road or in the forests that surround their homes. The elders are not wrong to do so, for fey beings and monstrous things do lurk close at hand, including shifters.

Your people live in secret in the Ashenwood among legendary monsters like Dar-Guran, the troll who can bite off a human's head. Yet you also live with more benign nature spirits that seem to exist in every limpid pool and quiet copse of trees. Some Rashemi see your race as the troll, while others view you as the spirit. Your own people often seem unsure, vacillating between savagery and primal harmony. You left them to find your own way.

Rashemen Shifter Regional Benefit

You add Damaran to your list of languages known, you add Nature to your class skills list, and you gain a +2 bonus to Bluff, Diplomacy, and Insight checks when dealing with fey.

Sembia

Many Sembians focus on maintaining appearances. Others remain watchful for weakness or signs of anti-Netherese or anti-Shar sympathies, and Netheril keeps it own eyes upon the poppulace. In a land bursting with façade and falsehood, the nobles of Selgaunt have more reason to lie than most—for before the Spellplague, Selgaunt's blue blood acquired a lycanthropic taint. Rumor lays the fault at the feet of the ruling Uskevrens, but no noble mentions that suspicion aloud. One need only touch

SHIFTERS AND THE GODS

Shifters worship many different gods depending upon their inclinations and situation, but certain deities have a special relationship with their wild souls.

Selûne: Shifters who follow Selûne adhere to her followers' view of lycanthropy as a curse. They see shifters' bestial nature as directly tied to the evil of lycanthropy and emphasize strict emotional control and shifting only when necessary. In some respects, shifters devoted to Selûne are trying to deny part of their nature, and they are often the most determined foes of lycanthropes among her followers.

Silvanus: Silvanus emphasizes the acceptance of savagery as part of the natural state of the world, which resonates deeply with many shifters. His teachings present a middle way between Selûne's emphasis on control of a shifter's animal instincts and Malar's desire for unfettered ferocity. Many shifters revere Silvanus, even those that live in cities.

Malar: Shifters often have a heritage of Malar-worship that extends well before the Spellplague due to ancestral ties to lycanthropes. They often worship Malar because their parents did, and see objections to Malar's evil as misunderstanding the essential nature of savagery and its necessary role in the world, and in shifters in particular. Many shifters see Malar's emphasis on unleashing the beast within as a rallying cry, fighting the forces of prejudice against their race.

finger to nose and talk of "hot blood" to indicate that a noble son or daughter carries "the curse."

Those "who can pass" are trained to suppress their instincts and take on their roles as idle socialites or merchant lords. Those who cannot meet varied fates. Some are accepted by their families but kept hidden from view. Others are cast out, fostered to those who owe favors or bargained to those who collect them. Which are you? Did you struggle to control your emotions amid finery and strict rules of etiquette, or did your foster parents put you to work as an agent in their trade? Were you forced to leave Sembia after your heritage was revealed, or were you sent on a trade mission to distant lands to get you out view of the Sembian public?

Sembia Shifter Regional Benefit

Add Bluff and Diplomacy to your class skill list. Add Netherese to your list of known languages.

When not shifting, you resemble a human more strongly than is normal for your race. This resemblance allows you to pass as human with a successful Bluff check against a creature's passive Insight, if you are not shifting. If someone makes an active Insight check against you, your Bluff check to disguise your shifter nature suffers a –5 penalty.

Tethyr

The noble Janors of Zazesspur hide a terrible secret—many of them can shed their skins. The family has several wereserpent members, and keeps this shameful knowledge hidden. None suspect that the sly, lithe, and beautiful Janor house smiles with poison-tipped fangs. Shifters that result from their unions with humans and half-elves are therefore carefully hidden. Without such precautions, many would move to destroy the Janors, first and foremost the noble family's scaled and sibilant masters.

How do the qualities of your wereserpent heritage show themselves in your shifter anatomy? How were you hidden from public view? Perhaps you were trained as an assassin for those who command your family members with seductive whispers. Maybe you were only allowed on the streets at night. Do you know who controls your family's fate? Do you want to save your family from itself, or have you made enemies of too many of them?

Tethyr Shifter Regional Benefit

Add Stealth to your class skill list. You gain a +2 bonus to Stealth checks. Add Chondathan or Draconic to your list of known languages.

About the Author

Matthew Sernett is a writer and game designer for Wizards of the Coast who has worked on both Dungeons & Dragons® and Magic: The Gathering®. Recent credits include *Monster Vault, Neverwinter Campaign Guide, Hero Builder's Handbook*, and *Scars of Mirrodin* for Magic: the Gathering. When he's not making monsters or building worlds, he's watching bad fantasy movies you don't realize exist and shouldn't bother to learn about.

Arena of Shadows

By Sarah Zettel
Illustration by Craig J. Spearing

Kalev Shadowfall was having a bad night.

It had started out well enough. Gaining entrance to Duke Arisor's palace had proven trivial. This was peaceful, ordered Fairhaven, after all. The duke trusted the queen's law and the governor's vigilance. Kalev only needed to bribe one guard to leave one gate in the outer wall open. After that, he had scaled the palace's ivy-covered wall so swiftly not even the nesting sparrows stirred. The laughter and music from the grand reception in the ballroom covered any stray sounds he made, and the hired patrol tromping through the gardens had completely failed to look up to see the extra shadow moving across the stones. Duke Arisor had become too cavalier about his own safety of late. He was not the first of Fairhaven's prosperous citizens to assume that because the city was well-ordered it was essentially safe. It was but one of his mistakes.

Another was selling information too sensitive to be allowed out of the capitol.

A few drops of oil and a thin blade had popped the next-to-useless lock on the study's window. Velvet draperies blocked off the sight of Kalev slipping down from the sill.

Kalev remembered thinking it was too easy as he stepped lightly down, not even rippling the drapes. He remembered wishing for a little challenge to add zest to the evening.

He also remembered thinking, Be careful what you wish for.

Because when Kalev peered between the drapes to make sure the study was empty, he saw a sprawling wreck of overturned furnishings and scattered papers surrounding the mutilated remains of a man dressed in emerald silk lying facedown in a large pool of blood.

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Kalev swallowed his shock, and made himself wait for a slow count of one hundred. No movement disturbed the gory scene. Kalev crept out into the darkened room and crouched beside the man to ascertain that he was in fact as dead as he looked. That didn't take long. The back of the corpse's scalp was torn open, exposing the bloody skull beneath. The neck and shoulders had been shredded, leaving strips of flesh and silk dangling across the floor. The man's arms were broken. The smell of fresh slaughter coated the inside of Kalev's nostrils and left its sick, sweet taint on the back of his throat.

Kalev reached out and prodded the stiffening hands, checking the rings until he found the one he was looking for: the sigil of peridot and onyx that belonged to Duke Arisor.

Snickt.

Kalev spun to face the door, drawing his right-hand dagger from his sash, and found himself face-to-face with a dark-haired, bejeweled woman wearing a formal gown of topaz silk.

Her startling violet eyes darted from Kalev to the dead duke, the ransacked study, and to Kalev again.

The woman opened her mouth. Kalev crouched, ready to spring across the corpse and muffle her scream.

"*Blast!*" she exclaimed.

The woman shoved the door shut and strode into the chaos, kicking up papers around her ankles. Kalev, for one of the few times in his life, found himself startled past the ability to move.

The woman went straight to a massive bookshelf that, like the unfortunate Duke Arisor, lay toppled on its face. She dug her fingers underneath its edge and strained.

"Help me!" she snapped.

Kalev blinked. "Aren't you concerned I might be the murderer?"

The woman rolled her eyes. "If you'd done that"—she jerked her chin toward the duke's gruesome remains—"you be covered in blood. You're not. If you were one of that lot downstairs, I'd've noticed you." She looked Kalev pointedly up and down. His long black coat, black breeches, black tunic, gloves, and boots would indeed have stood out sharply in the ballroom. "And you'd've summoned the guard. You haven't. So, you're probably here to steal, which doesn't bother me, as long as we're not after the same thing."

"Admirably practical." Kalev bowed his head. She was wrong about his reasons for being there, but there was no immediate need to point that out. Kalev stowed his dagger, stepped lightly to the other side of the shelf and crouched down.

"On three then," he said. "One, two, three."

A blur of midnight dropped down between them.

Kalev fell back, rolled over his shoulder and came up on his feet, his dagger in his hand once more and a flush on his face for failing to look up in time like some lazy guard.

A stinking, humanish creature dressed in rags sewn with bones landed beside the duke's corpse. One hand brandished a notched short sword, the other clutched what looked like a golden statue of a cyclops. It bellowed wordlessly, revealing a mouth full of black teeth.

Skulk! Kalev leaped backward.

"Grab it!" shouted the woman.

"*What!*" cried Kalev, his voice embarrassingly shrill.

The woman snatched up a broken chair to swing at the skulk's head. The skulk ducked, howled, and raised its blade.

Then, it jerked around and jumped head-first out the window.

The woman dived after it, arms outstretched. She missed by bare inches and sprawled full-length on the floor, sending up a shower of papers.

A heartbeat later, shouts rose through the open window. Kalev shoved the curtains open, and looked down at the crowd of guards gathered below. Some hared off into the darkness, presumably on the trail of the skulk, which had already vanished. The rest stayed put, probably waiting for orders.

"We need to clear that lot away, or we're never getting out of here."

The woman understood at once. She scrambled to her feet.

"Help!" she wailed at the top of her lungs. "Duke Arisor is attacked! Oh, help!"

Attacked. Not murdered. The guard will come check the study. Smart. Below, an officer barked orders. Half the patrol headed for the walls, the other half sprinted toward the main doors, leaving the space under the windows clear.

The woman wasted no more time. She leaped onto the sill. There came a loud ripping noise and Kalev suddenly found a mass of topaz fabric flying at his head.

He knocked the bulky missile aside. When he could see again, the window sill was empty.

The sound of running feet in the corridor was very loud.

Kalev swung himself onto the sill, grabbed the ivy and climbed down until he could safely let himself drop to the ground. He landed in time to see a faint flash of jewels in the lamp light as the woman scaled the outer wall.

Kalev set off at a run. He seldom lost his way, even in the dark, and quickly found the side gate again. It was still open. He was through and out into the street in time to draw a look of startled fury from the woman—now clad in breeches, boots, and a tight, dark tunic—as she gazed down at him from the top of the wall.

Before he could say anything, two massive hands yanked him off his feet and slammed him against the wall.

When his vision cleared, Kalev found himself pinned against the wall an inch off the ground, staring into the brutish face of a battered warforged. Essentially a living suit of armor, the creature had one massive fist cocked back and ready to punch Kalev's unprotected head.

"Sheroth!" The woman dropped lightly to the cobbles. "The target's this way!"

The warforged—Sheroth—growled, let Kalev drop and lumbered after the woman. Kalev hit the cobbles, staggering a moment before he found his footing.

He stared after the retreating pair. What was going on?

The only way to answer that was to follow the woman and the warforged. Choosing the thickest shadows, Kalev ran.

Fairhaven was a city of wide avenues and tall spires, famed for its beauty. Duke Arisor however, controlled the majority of the spice trade on the river and had built his main residence close to the docks to keep an eye on his ships and his warehouses. Outside his palace, the district was low, mean, and twisted. The alleys Kalev ran through now had more in common with a dungeon than a Fairhaven thoroughfare and all of his senses were on high alert for footpads as well as for his quarry. Fortunately, this particular warforged hadn't been created for stealth and Kalev, silent in his soft-soled boots, had no trouble following Sheroth's thudding footfalls as the warforged stomped over cobbles and packed dirt.

Abruptly, the lumbering footsteps ceased. Kalev skidded to a halt at the corner of a sagging wood and brick warehouse. Dagger ready, he eased himself around the corner.

Someone whimpered. Kalev's eyes darted left to see a pile of tattered darkness shifting on the other side of a darkened threshold. Kalev peered more closely and saw a slender girl staring back at him, tightly clutching a bundle of rags.

"Don't go back there," whispered the girl.

"Why?" Kalev stepped up to the threshold and crouched down in front of the girl. "What's back there?"

The girl drew a huge breath.

"Idiot!" cried a familiar woman's voice.

Kalev was snatched from behind and once more tossed against the wall. This time his head connected with the filthy bricks and stars exploded across his vision. When his eyes cleared, he saw the woman from the duke's study barrel past him and collide with the girl, knocking them both into the darkness of the warehouse.

"Don't!" cried the girl as she groped one-handed backward, clutching her bundle more tightly.

Kalev found his feet. The warforged filled the narrow alley juncture. Inside the warehouse, the woman . . .

The woman blurred and changed. Now there were two girls, one in rags, one practically swimming in the tunic and trousers the woman had worn. The first girl stared, eyes bugging out.

Then, that ragamuffin also blurred, and also changed, becoming an orc with heavy arms and a wide, grinning mouth but still with the bundle of rags clutched in one clawed hand.

The second girl shifted, and now the orc faced an elf; slim and golden haired.

"Don't just *stand* there," rumbled Sheroth from behind Kalev.

Kalev gaped at the warforged, who wore a broadsword on his back and a morningstar at his hip. "What about you?"

"Too big." Sheroth looked down at him with glowing eyes. "Not too big to get you though."

Kalev swallowed. It had not been his night.

Inside the warehouse, the two . . . beings . . . shifted and shifted again, becoming human, monster, male, female, beautiful, hideous by turns. Two things did not change. The bundle of rags held by the one, and the clothing of the other. Which gave Kalev his target, which had now shrunk to become a bearded dwarf in full armor.

Kalev gritted his teeth, hefted his dagger and charged.

He hit the dwarf with his shoulder and they went down together, rolling and grappling. Despite what Kalev's eyes told him, his hands felt no mail, or hair, just muscled flesh. Nails raked his face.

WHAM!

The building shuddered around them as Sheroth—a living battering ram—slammed against the doorway. Praying the warforged didn't bring the aging building down on top of them, Kalev stabbed down at his opponent. The now-dwarf howled as the dagger struck home and kicked straight into Kalev's belly with both feet. The wind left Kalev in a rush and he catapulted backward. A second figure leaped over

him, slim as a girl but with white skin and ivory hair tinged with lavender. The being wore the woman's tunic, trousers, and jewels, and wrapped its bare hands around the other shapechanger's throat. The shapechanger choked and growled, and reverted to a bundle of dark sinewy limbs and snarling hatred.

Wheezing hard, Kalev forced himself back into his fighting stance. The shapechangers spun round, grappling. Sheroth pounded the narrow doorway, making a deafening thunder over the fight. Kalev looked frantically for an opening as they rolled on the floor, snarling and screaming, and found none.

But he did spot the bundle of rags lying on the ground.

Kalev snatched the bundle up. It was heavy, and about the size of a loaf of bread. Gold gleamed under the tattered sacking.

"Who wants it?" Kalev held the bundle high.

The shapechangers froze and Kalev found himself facing two pairs of eyes, one murderous and dark, one furious and shining amethyst.

"Mine," croaked the skulk. "Mine or I kill it!"

Kalev had no time to make an answer. The other combatant took advantage of the skulk's inattention and gouged at its eyes with hooked fingers. The skulk bellowed and threw the other backward so hard she flew through the air and hit a pile of empty barrels with a cry.

"Vix!" Sheroth slammed its bulk once more against the doorframe. The whole building groaned. Wood and brick gave way with a splintering crash. Sheroth rocketed into the low-beamed space.

The skulk howled and leaped and Kalev found himself tumbling head over heels. He stabbed out, felt his dagger catch, and be ripped from his hand, followed by the bundle.

His arms were empty and the skulk was bounding for the much-enlarged doorway. Sheroth planted himself in its path, but it dived straight between the warforged's massive legs. Kalev tried to scramble after it, but tumbled over one of the barrels dislodged by Vix's impact and turned another undignified summersault to slam up against Sheroth's shins.

The skulk vanished into the night.

Sheroth shook his head and set Kalev on his feet. Then he shuffled past, almost on his knees he had to crouch so low.

"You all right, Vix?"

"Just about." Vix sat with her head in her hands, her wild white hair sticking out in all directions. When she looked up, she caught Kalev staring at her.

"You're a changeling," he said.

"And you're a fool." Vix spat blood and dust and wiped her pale mouth.

Kalev shrugged. "Possibly." He reclaimed his dagger and sheathed it. "But my name is Kalev."

She glowered at him with her bright amethyst eyes. Kalev knew some changelings didn't think of themselves in terms of human genders, but he couldn't make himself think of the pale being in front of him as a "he" much less an "it."

"Do you want to tell me what this is about?" Kalev gestured around the warehouse.

Vix shifted her weight uneasily and glanced up at Sheroth. Sheroth shook his heavy head.

"I've already saved your life," Kalev pointed out. "You at least owe me an explanation."

Vix eyed Sheroth. This time Sheroth only shrugged, the plates that formed its shoulders grating together.

Vix slumped forward, resting her forearms on her knees. "It's not that complicated. A piece of property was stolen. It was traced to Duke Arisor. I was . . . hired to get it back. Quietly."

"Hired?" Kalev arched his brows.

"More or less." The changeling rubbed a smear of cobweb from her pale forehead.

"And would I be correct in assuming this piece of property is more than just an ugly statuette?"

Vix studied her fingertips a moment before she met Kalev's gaze. "It's called the Memory Eye and it's a magical artifact. Other than that, I don't know and I'm dead anyway so it doesn't really matter."

Kalev arched his brow. "Dead?"

"Metaphorically speaking. I hope." Vix got to her feet, using Sheroth's arm to steady herself. "I can't believe I let it get away!" With surprising gentleness, the warforged laid a hand on the changeling's slim shoulder.

"Do you even know what that was?" asked Kalev.

"It was a skulk. Foul thing." Vix spat again. "Must have been a mesmerist. That kind can cast an illusion on its victims. A lot of people think they're shapeshifters, which just makes life more difficult for those of us who truly are."

Kalev nodded. A lot of people did not like nor trust changelings, believing that their ability to change form made them inherently devious.

"But skulks aren't thieves," said Kalev. "They're predators. Why would this one give up the chance for a kill for this . . . what did you call it? Memory Eye?" Arisor had been involved in some shady dealings, but according to Kalev's information, he'd never dealt in magical artifacts.

Vix cocked her head toward him. "You know a lot for a sneak thief."

"So do you," countered Kalev.

"You never did say what you were doing in the duke's study."

"You said you didn't care."

Vix waved a hand, acknowledging the point. "Well, thanks for the rescue. Time we were going, Sheroth."

You're not getting away that easily, he thought. "We could help each other," said Kalev with a feigned casualness. "You want to find the Memory Eye. I want to find out why it was stolen by a skulk, and what Duke Arisor was doing with it in the first place."

"Why?"

"I'm insatiably curious."

Vix watched him carefully for a long moment. "Why should I work with someone who's lying to me?"

"I'm not. I'm just keeping my own secrets. There's a difference. I'd think a changeling could understand that," he added.

Vix glanced up at Sheroth again. Kalev found himself wondering how long the two had travelled together.

"All right," said Vix. "But I can't start yet. Meet me at the Arena of Unparalleled Wonder at dawn. I'll be coming off shift then."

Kalev straightened up. "You work at the Arena? I didn't know House Phiarlan hired changelings."

"Neither do they." Vix's form blurred and Kalev again faced the graceful, dark-haired woman.

"We'll see you at dawn." Vix picked her way through the ruined doorway and into the alley. Sheroth gave Kalev a hard glower before shambling after the changeling.

Kalev waited until the pair had vanished and nothing remained but the sound of the warforged's heavy feet. Then, using all the skill he had at moving undetected, Kalev followed.

* * *

The Arena of Unparalleled Wonder was House Phiarlan's greatest theater and even by Fairhaven standards, an incredible sight. From the alley mouth Kalev stared at the sparkling edifice. It took up an entire city block and its mass of glittering domes and crystal spires towered over its neighbors. There was always at least one performance going on one of the dozen public stages or the six or eight private performance spaces. The finest actors and entertainers fought for a chance to play there. And why wouldn't they? Queen Aurala herself attended the shows at least monthly.

Kalev was not seeing the Arena from its best angle. He was watching one of the many side doors where Vix and Sheroth stood talking. He itched to know what they said, but dared not get closer. At last, Vix touched the warforged's arm in farewell, and went inside. Sheroth took a post beside the door.

The streets around were busy, as the cream of Fairhaven's society enjoyed a night's carousing. The place would have been a pick-pocket's paradise if it wasn't for the sharp-eyed members of the public guard standing by on the street corners. Queen Aurala felt that if petty crime ran rampant through her capital it would reflect badly on her work toward a peaceful, stable realm, and in this at least, her brother the governor shared her opinions.

Kalev considered his situation. He now had more than one mystery on his hands.

Despite Vix's assumptions, he was not a thief. He had been given the task of finding the skulk that was slaughtering the city aristocracy. Normally, such beasts were relatively easy to track, once you knew what you were looking for, but this one had not been exhibiting normal skulk behavior. Skulks were clever, but not subtle. They worked with none but their own kind, and they were cold killers, interested only in maximizing carnage. But after the third death, it had become clear the targets were not being chosen at random. Each one of the dead had recently provided the queen's intelligence services with information. Kalev had been in Arisor's study to search for signs the aristocratic smuggler might have gone into the information trade. Instead, he'd landed in this business with Vix and the Memory Eye . . . Kalev fingered the medallion he wore beneath his shirt. What's more, actually finding a skulk was a surprise. He'd expected to find a human trying to make the deaths look like a skulk's work.

My night for being wrong, he thought. But what did a skulk want with a magical artifact? And could it be coincidence that Vix and he both came to Duke Arisor's study at the same moment? Even if she was only a hired thief, whoever hired her might have more on their mind than retrieving their property.

Kalev needed answers, and he did not have time to search the whole Arena for them, never mind the whole city. He made his decision and pulled out his medallion.

The day Kalev joined the Royal Eyes—the secret intelligence service belonging to QueenAurala—he had been given this badge. The day he had been set on the trail of the skulk, the medallion had been given a spell. It would work only once, Keue Fourthmaster, the Eyes' quartermaster, told him. So he was not to waste it, or lose it. But for that one time, it would allow Kalev to see what he was looking for, no matter how many barriers stood between him and the target.

The problem was, if Kalev used it at too great a distance, he would not be able to exactly determine the location of what he sought, and then the spell would be used up. The further problem was there might yet come a better chance, a greater need to see something. Kalev weighed the medallion in his hand and the decision in his mind.

Then, as he had been directed, he placed the gold disk against his left eye and murmured the words to activate the embedded spell.

The medallion grew warm against his skin.

"Who has the Memory Eye?" he whispered. "I need to see who has the Memory Eye."

Instantly, the world around him faded. The effect was dizzying. People became ghosts, and buildings thin mist. Only one thing remained solid; a black stain slipping down one of the Arena's great gilded domes. It clutched a bundle to its chest that, to Kalev's spell-enhanced gaze, glowed like a beacon. The skulk shambled across the roof, lifted a trapdoor and jumped through.

And all the world was solid again and Kalev was staring with one eye covered at the Arena.

The skulk was in there, somewhere. The skulk, and Vix, who had spun him a story of blackmail and simple thievery. Kalev felt his jaw harden and he narrowed his eyes at Sheroth, standing straight and still in front of the stage door with its massive arms folded. Time was slipping rapidly away.

The direct approach then.

Kalev took a deep breath and pelted across the street, dodging horses, carriages, and pedestrians alike. Sheroth looked up, and his jaw dropped.

Kalev didn't give him any time for questions. "Sheroth! The skulk's in the Arena!"

Warforged were fine tacticians and decent strategists, but Kalev had yet to meet one who could lie worth a damn. So Kalev was certain the surprise that stiffened Sheroth's stance was genuine. As were his next words.

"I have to warn Vix."

"It went in through a trapdoor in the roof, to the southwest of the smaller gilded dome," said Kalev quickly. "Is there any way you can check that out quietly while I let Vix know what's happened?"

"If it gets down into the bowels of the Arena we'll never find it," Sheroth muttered and Kalev held his breath until the warforged met his gaze. "Vix'll be in her dressing room. Second stairs on your left going in, two flights up, first right, third door on the left-hand side, got that?"

Kalev nodded and Sheroth went on. "Tell Vix I'll meet you at door twelve. Door twelve. Got that?"

"Door twelve."

Sheroth opened the door. "Quick."

Kalev nipped inside the Arena of Unparalleled Wonder, and into another world.

Kalev had attended Arena performances many times. He was familiar with the gilt and glitter of the front of the house, every aspect of it designed to amaze. This was nothing like that.

It was a world of timber, painted canvas, and shadows. All manner of effigies hung from fine black lines, looking disconcertingly like they were floating in midair. Ropes as thick as his wrist connected systems of huge pulleys. A steam elemental sat in a brass housing at the center of a complex conglomeration of wooden cogs and metal gears that drove shafts reaching up into the ceiling and down into the floor.

Actors and dancers in glittering costumes darted like butterflies between the stagehands in dark tunics and breeches. Burly men hefted boulders and pillars on their shoulders. The floor vibrated from the motion of feet and carts and machines. Humans and half-elves trudged back and forth, burdened by boxes or great piles of cloth, or hauled on ropes, or signaled up to the catwalks to the ones handling the massive glowing crystals that lit the stages.

Those catwalks made a network overhead that stretched farther out and higher up than Kalev could see. As his eyes adjusted to the dim light, he caught glimpses of stairways traveling down as well as up, and arched doorways leading to darkened corridors.

You could hide an army in here, Kalev thought.

Kalev was also very aware that despite standing in shadow, as the only one here without any clear purpose he stuck out like a sore thumb. It was only a matter of moments before someone noticed him. He shifted his demeanor so he projected confidence and strode to the second stair on the left leading upward. As long as he didn't do something clod-brained like get in someone's way, he would probably be ignored.

He hoped.

The third door after the first right had the name Vixana Fairlight scrawled on it in chalk, a sign of how quickly things turned over in the Arena. Kalev knocked, but did not wait for an answer before he walked in.

Vix, in her guise as a dark-haired human woman, started to her feet.

"Get out of here!" she cried. "I don't need more trouble!"

"Neither do I, but . . ."

Footsteps sounded outside. Vix swore and shoved Kalev backward behind a folding screen draped with layers of dresses and cloaks. "Keep quiet!" she hissed.

The space smelled of old perfumes and powders. Kalev stepped back from the screen to keep his silhouette from showing, and breathed shallowly. He heard a faint swish as the door opened on well-oiled hinges.

"There you are, Vixana," said a rough male voice. "What's the news?"

"Nemar." Vix sounded anything but glad. "It's good. I've almost tracked down the . . . it."

So, this Nemar was Vix's "employer." "*Almost* tracked it down!" Nemar exploded, then he seemed to remember he didn't want to be overheard. "I *told* you where it was!" he hissed.

"Unfortunately, Duke Arisor got himself murdered by a skulk," replied Vix evenly, but her voice was taut as a harp string. "Which stole your precious item."

"A skulk *stole* something?"

"Yes," replied Vix coldly. "Strange, don't you think? A creature that has no place in Fairhaven shows up and kills the duke shortly before I got to his study."

"None of your lip, thief." Nemar's voice turned truly ugly. "You swore you'd have it for me tonight!"

"I'll get it."

"You'd better." Heavy footsteps crossed the floor, cloth swished and wood creaked. Kalev tensed. He didn't want to show himself but he wouldn't stand by and let Vix be hurt. "You've got one too many secrets to fail, you and that warforged lummox."

"Leave Sheroth out of this!"

"I'll say what I like, *Vix*," sneered Nemar. "You just be sure you finish your job."

The door opened and shut and footsteps walked away.

Kalev emerged from behind the screen. Vix said nothing, she just sat down at the table of cosmetics and slowly began opening boxes and jars.

"Who is Nemar?"

Vix dipped her fingers into a paint pot and spread bright red cream across her lips. "He's the manager for stage eight. My employer."

"And your blackmailer, if I don't miss my guess. How'd he find out you were a changeling?"

"I took a fall one night," she murmured, watching her reflection. What's it like to stare into your own false face? Kalev wondered. "Almost broke my leg. The pain was bad. It's harder to hold a shape when you're hurting. He . . . caught me changing."

"And are you a thief?"

"I used to be." She wiped her fingertips on a towel. "No one hires changelings, so I fell in with a pack of adventurers. But I like living more than I like gold, so I came to Fairhaven to try to make a new start."

Kalev thought about the ugly snarl in Nemar's voice, and how he was the one who sent Vix after the Memory Eye. If a changeling thief was caught in a room with a corpse, how much further would the city guard look to find the murderer? "And Sheroth?"

"If you want to know his business, you can ask him," she snapped.

"I see."

"Do you?" She glowered at him in the mirror. Kalev made no answer, he just met her gaze.

Vix blinked first. "I've got a performance." She got up and made to brush past him.

"You've got more than that," he said. "The skulk's in the theater somewhere."

"*What!*"

"It got in through one of the roof trapdoors. It's in here, and it's got the Memory Eye with it."

For a moment, Kalev saw the changeling's pale coloring through the human's warmer flesh tones. "What in the name of all the hells is going on?" she demanded.

"That's a very good question," Kalev agreed. "Do you know what Nemar's connection to the Memory Eye is? Or Duke Arisor?"

Vix shook her head. "I never asked."

Then, thought Kalev, that's what I need to find out next.

Vix narrowed her eyes at him, as if she could read his thoughts. "Are you planning on *spying* on him?"

"I'm afraid I must."

He waited for her to protest, but she just sighed. "Don't get caught. I've got enough problems."

"I'll do my best. Sheroth's also on the case. He said to meet him by door twelve after your act. We can all rendezvous there once you get off stage and plan our next move."

"You invite yourself along very easily." Vix snorted. "Why should we trust you?"

"Because you're in trouble, and there's no one else to help you."

Vix pressed her lips together in a hard line but he could tell she realized he was right. "My set lasts exactly fifteen minutes. I'll meet you at door twelve." She grabbed a spangled cloak and marched out the door.

Which left Kalev with one problem; how to find this Nemar in the Arena's labyrinthine backstage, without being noticed and thrown out. He scanned the dressing room, hoping for inspiration. He found it on the broken writing desk that had been shoved into one corner of the dressing room.

Kalev buttoned his black coat all the way up to his throat and pulled his breeches out of his boot tops. He tucked his gloves into his pockets and dipped his right index finger into the inkwell. He plucked up a pen and ink pot and strode purposefully to the door. Now, if anyone spared him a glance, they would see nothing but a clerk, and who ever gave a clerk a second thought? It was almost as good as being invisible.

He emerged from the dressing room in time to peer over the railing to the main floor and watch Vix join a gaggle of sparkling costumed dancers all heading in the same direction.

"Now that's a beautiful sight."

Kalev jumped. A man stood beside him, a half-elf by the look of him. He'd moved into place so silently and easily, that for all his skills Kalev hadn't even noticed him. Then, Kalev realized he recognized him.

The half-elf was Gledeth Shore, the lead actor of the Arena. Kalev had seen him in his new drama less than a month ago, before the murders started. He had the fine-boned structure of a Valenar war prince combined with the lively energy of a charming human male. On stage, it was a lethal combination.

Kalev remembered his character of fussy clerk and sniffed.

Gledeth laughed and slapped his shoulder. Kalev flinched as if the blow was too hard, which only made Gledeth laugh harder. "Just don't get caught staring too long," he said, his eyes suddenly serious. "Or you might wind up in trouble." Then chuckling once more, he strolled off.

Kalev watched him go, thoroughly disquieted. What did the most famous actor in all of Fairhaven care what a clerk did or did not stare at?

Kalev wavered and cursed silently. He hunched his shoulders and shook his head so his hair flopped down across his brow, and started down the stairs. If Nemar was the stage manager, he would be in the wings, ready to line up the members of the dance troupe and give them their cue. Kalev would know the man as soon as he spoke and then . . .

"You!" shouted a furious voice. Kalev froze on the last step. A woman clad in a long black coat and carrying a huge ledger under her arm shouldered her way through the bustling stagehands. "Where do you think you're going!"

It was then Kalev realized his disguise had a fatal flaw. No one spared a clerk a second thought, except, of course, another clerk.

* * *

Ten minutes, three flights of stairs, and half-a-dozen corridors later, Kalev found himself in the office of Mirias Jadering Phiarlan, a surprisingly stocky elf who wore his golden hair in a single braid that hung between his shoulder blades and displayed the great, green earring that had given him his name. Kalev knew Mirias only by reputation, but that reputation was extensive. Mirias could make Kalev disappear so thoroughly not even the Eyes would be able to find his corpse.

Kalev sat beside the hearth in his office. Mirias's gaze bored straight into the back of his mind.

"So, tell me," Mirias said. "What brings you backstage at my Arena without ticket or invitation?"

Kalev crossed his legs, feigning relaxation. "There have been a rash of murders among the city's merchant aristocracy. I'm sure you heard."

Mirias nodded once.

"I am investigating these crimes. I have reason to believe they are connected to the Arena, and to the theft of a magical artifact known as the Memory Eye."

Mirias's green eyes narrowed.

"It was stolen from the study of Duke Arisor," Kalev continued, "who was murdered tonight, and now I find one of your stage managers is astonishingly eager to get his hands on it."

"Why is this any of your business?"

"As I said, I've been hired to find out the cause of the deaths."

"Hired by whom?"

Kalev smiled pleasantly and made no answer.

Mirias flexed his long fingers. "Nemar has bad luck at the gaming tables," he said at last. "He tends to . . . acquire objects of value and sell them. Good stage managers are difficult to find, so we have been tolerated it."

"And now?" Kalev inquired.

"We may have to rethink this policy."

"In that case, I have proposition," said Kalev. "Let me continue my investigations. If Nemar is behind the murders, I will make the problem go away, without anyone asking a single question, or casting any aspersions on House Phiarlan."

Mirias considered this. "I will give you one day. After that, I will take matters into my own hands."

Kalev inclined his head. "One last question. What is the Memory Eye?"

"The Memory Eye projects a copy of the last thing it's seen. For example, if it was on the main stage now, it would see Lady Daria Goldeneye in one of her most popular scenes. If its recall were activated, it would project that same scene so perfectly you would not be able to tell it from the original." He paused,

attempting to gauge Kalev's reaction to this. "As such, it is very useful, particularly if a popular artist has fallen ill, or succumbed to a fit of temperament. The performance can go on and no one in the audience is any the wiser."

Or demanding their entry fee refunded. "I can see where such an artifact would have . . . many uses," Kalev said. It could allow a person, say a stage manager, to be in two places at once. As he thought this, another face flashed in front of his mind's eye and Kalev found himself wondering if Nemar was working alone. The stage manager was already employed by House Phiarlan in one capacity, why not another? It was possible the story of Nemar's gambling debts was just that, a story. Mirias could very well be holding Nemar's leash, and the skulk's.

If House Phiarlan was engaged in a campaign against the Queen's intelligence sources . . .

Kalev got to his feet. "Thank you for your time. I will not forget this."

"Neither will I," said Mirias softly, as they shook hands.

* * *

"Where have you been?" Vix demanded. After his meeting with Mirias, it had taken Kalev almost another half hour to track down the street exit with the big white twelve painted on its black surface.

"Finding out about the Memory Eye, and about your blackmailing boss." And possibly getting led down a garden path. He looked around the alley where they stood. "Where's Sheroth?"

"I don't know." Vix wrapped her arms around herself.

Worry prickled Kalev too. Despite his brief acquaintance with them both, he knew Sheroth would never leave Vix waiting.

Kalev was beginning to see that whoever was behind this had spun an incredible web. The Memory Eye would allow them to be in two places at once, so they could work the social networks of the city and identify key information agents, but always with an alibi. Then, they could send in the skulk, who could hide in plain sight, to take out any agent who was getting too close to something important, or who might be about to change sides. Everyone knew skulks killed at random, so no one would ask why one person or another had been murdered.

But how was the skulk being controlled? Skulks worked for no one, obeyed no one, cared for nothing but death.

"We have to find the skulk," he said briskly.

Vix was not going to be so easily distracted. "Not until I know what's happened to Sheroth."

Kalev faced her. "Vix, if the skulk got a look at your true shape, it could have used it to lure Sheroth away from here."

Vix's eyes flashed amethyst. Then, she turned and started swiftly down the alley with Kalev following right behind.

They rounded the corner of the Arena, to a space filled with theatrical wagons painted with bright murals advertising acts and actors. Vix threw open a metal trapdoor set into the cobbles. Without hesitation, she climbed down a series of iron staples bolted to the wall. Kalev did the same. When he finally reached the floor, Kalev heard Vix speak a word he did not recognize. White light flared around her.

Kalev raised an eyebrow. Vix held up the glowing crystal for him to see. "We're all issued one. It's not safe to have flames burning unattended in here."

The room around them proved to be a storage space for fabric. It was lined with shelves stuffed with bolts of cloth in all textures and colors. Vix unlocked the door and let them out into a hallway lined with doors.

"What are these?" Kalev asked as they walked into the corridor.

"Store rooms, mostly," replied Vix. "Doors to other stairs, to the work rooms, pump rooms, light rooms."

"How big is this place?"

"No one knows. There are rumors about whole families having lived down in these tunnels for generations." She ducked into another store room, surveyed the shelves and reached one handed between two bales of fabric. To Kalev's surprise, she pulled out a spear made of a piece of black glass tightly lashed to a wooden shaft. She handed it to him and then brought out its twin.

"These rumors . . . ," he began, but she looked at him in a way that said quite eloquently she would answer no question that followed those words. Clutching his new weapon, Kalev turned away, but froze.

A trail of footsteps showed up plainly in the grime.

"Well, someone's been this way recently."

Vix held the crystal high and swore. "Sheroth."

"Are you sure?"

Vix pointed to the print of a huge, flat foot. "What else has a print like that?"

Kalev said nothing, just gestured with his spear, indicating that she should lead the way.

Following the faint trail in the dust, they traversed a series of ancient storerooms filled with the dusty detritus of the theater: pots and jars and crates,

stacks of wood, coils of rope, folds of canvas. They passed through rooms filled with props, looking like the contents of whole homes had been stacked in corners and piled on shelves. The doors had been placed at strange angles, seldom directly across from each other, so each exit was a quarter turn from the entrance. The result was the uncomfortable sensation of going in circles. Mildew permeated the stale air. A constant rustling accompanied them, and Kalev glimpsed the flash of red eyes as rats scuttled away from the unexpected light. Rickety stairways, their entrances half-hidden by piles of debris or crates led them farther down. Kalev found himself quietly praying Vix's crystal didn't fail. Without the light, they'd be permanently lost in this labyrinth.

To keep his mind off that highly uncomfortable possibility, Kalev turned over the thousand questions that thronged in his mind. What had convinced Sheroth to come down here? Had he truly followed a skulk in Vix's shape? But who controlled the skulk? How? It would have to be a powerful spell, or . . .

Kalev remembered the sight of Vix fighting the skulk, shapechanger facing shapechanger. Could a skulk mesmerist itself be under the spell of another kind of mesmerist? Someone who could not or would not do their own murder. Someone who had a quick mind, and the glib tongue to cover any small inconsistencies.

Someone who had a predictable routine and could hide in plain sight, if they had the help of the Memory Eye . . .

They came to a stair that was stone rather than wood. There was no more trail, but there was also no other exit from the room, so they headed down. It ended in a small space with walls of rough stone. Sewer stench permeated the draft that curled around Kalev's neck. Icy water leaked through the mortared joints and puddled on the ancient flagstones. For a moment he thought they'd hit a dead end, but then, he saw a low crawl-way near the floor.

Must go under the sewers, he thought.

Vix saw the crawl-way too, and she held the crystal close to it, but the white light only penetrated a few inches into the stinking dark. Kalev looked at the changeling armed with her makeshift spear. "You'd better head back. I'll find Sheroth and bring him out to you."

"No," she said flatly, as he expected her too. "Sheroth has always stood by me. I'm not abandoning him to whatever's down there."

For a moment Kalev considered telling her who he was, and who he worked for. She was trustworthy. She could take a message back to his control for him, to let them know what had happened, just in case he never came out of this hole.

But in the end all he did was nod once. "Then let's end this."

To Kalev's surprise she let him go first, handing over the crystal without argument. Awkwardly, because of the spear and the crystal, Kalev crawled into the tunnel. It bent like a saddlebow and was coated with a stinking slime Kalev did not care to speculate about. His breath steamed in the crystal's light.

Finally, every joint aching, Kalev emerged from the tunnel into what he felt to be an open space. He held the crystal up high.

They stood in a strange, irregular chamber. Its filthy walls and ceiling curved sharply inward, making Kalev think it might be a juncture of sewer tunnels. Fetid heaps of dirt and refuse filled the many corners.

In its center stood Sheroth.

"Sheroth!" Vix cried as she emerged from the crawl-way and darted forward. "What . . . ?"

"Get back, Vix!" bellowed Sheroth.

In the next heartbeat, the warforged drew his broadsword and charged, straight for Kalev. Kalev sprang to the side. Sheroth's momentum carried him past, but he pivoted faster than Kalev would have credited, and charged again.

"Sheroth!" cried Vix. "Stop!"

"He'll kill you!" Sheroth aimed a swing at Kalev's head. Kalev skipped back. He didn't dare parry. The spear's shaft would snap like a stick against Sheroth's blade.

"No! He's a friend!"

"He's a liar!" roared Sheroth.

If Kalev were facing a human, he'd just keep him on the run, using his speed to stay out of range and wear the other down. But he would wear down long before the warforged would.

Desperation giving him strength, Kalev hoisted himself one-handed up the pile of debris.

"Coward!" bellowed Sheroth as he charged again.

"Sheroth!" Vix leaped into his path. "What're you doing!"

"He's the murderer!" The warforged's eyes glowed with his outrage. "He killed the duke!"

"The skulk killed the duke!" Vix grabbed the warforged's raised sword arm and hauled down with all her strength. "Who told you this?"

Sheroth looked at her, momentarily paralyzed with confusion.

"I did," said a man's smooth voice, and Kalev found he was absolutely unsurprised to see Gledeth Shore emerge from the shadows flanked by two skulks.

"What are you doing here?" Vix asked. Gledeth smiled indulgently down at her.

"He's a psion," said Kalev, not taking his eyes off Sheroth. "He's using his mind to control the skulks. He made them steal for him. He's convinced Sheroth you're in danger from me."

"So I very much suggest you get out of his way," said Gledeth to Vix.

"Sheroth's not going to hurt me," replied Vix calmly, looking up into the warforged's dull eyes and shifting, revealing her true form. "Sheroth will never hurt me."

Sheroth met Vix's amethyst eyes, and his body swayed.

Gledeth's eyes narrowed. "Hmmm . . . you may be right. Ah, well, Kalev, you'll just have to set your skulks on her."

The skulks roared and lunged forward. Vix screamed and stabbed out, catching one skulk in the shoulder. The skulk howled and reeled, and she pivoted on her heel to face the other sneering murderer.

"Kill them!" Gledeth shouted.

Sheroth plowed into the unsteady pile of debris Kalev perched on top of. Kalev leaped for the warforged's armored shoulders, and bounced off, scarcely jarring Sheroth at all. He hit the floor hard, barely staying upright. Vix shouted again as both skulks charged her. She sliced one on the arm with her blade, sending it staggering backward, and with the back stroke slammed the butt of her spear into the other one's guts.

"They'll kill her!" Kalev bellowed to Sheroth. "You've got to do something! They'll *kill Vix!*"

Sheroth froze, just for an eye-blink. Kalev could practically feel the wave of power pouring from the psion, but it was not enough. It could not be enough to break such loyalty. Sheroth roared and turned, brandishing his blade in one massive hand. With the other, he grabbed the nearest skulk and tossed it aside.

Kalev faced Gledeth, spear poised. "Who are you working for, Gledeth?"

"You expect me to name my masters to you?"

Kalev smiled patiently. "You've got to be about at your breaking point. You can't let the skulks go, they're just as likely to kill you as us. You can't let Sheroth go because he and Vix will take you down. If I want, all I have to do is wait it out, and you die."

The half-elf's eyes glittered. "Perhaps all I need do is wait until my skulks kill your pathetic allies. Then you are mine."

"You think I won't fight?"

"I think you don't want to," said the psion. "What I know is too useful to you and to your little queen. You need me to name my spy master. You know that you do."

He did. He wanted to bring Gledeth back alive, to see him questioned, to find out what the half-elf's plans were, why he had murdered, and who he was working for or with. It could be a threat to the whole of the realm and he, Kalev, could end it all, be a hero to the queen. If he could just capture Gledeth Shore alive.

Kalev swayed on his feet. "I . . . need . . . you."

Just then, Sheroth bellowed and stomped down on one of the skulks. There was a sickening crunch and squish as the creature's skull splintered beneath the warforged's foot.

Gledeth grinned and turned his shining eyes onto Kalev, in time to see Kalev's dagger flying toward him, but not fast enough to dodge before the blade embedded itself in his throat.

"But I want you dead more," said Kalev.

Gledeth gurgled and fell as a welter of blood spilled down the front of his silken tunic. Kalev turned in time to see Sheroth grab the remaining skulk and hold it so Vix could run her spear straight into its wide-open mouth, slitting flesh and crashing through bone. The skulk gagged and gurgled and sagged, spouting blood, and Sheroth flung the creature away.

Vix and Sheroth faced each other, panting, shaking, their friendship unbroken, the slow understanding of true circumstances that comes after a battle washing over them. Kalev retrieved his dagger and wiped the blood and gore on Gledeth's sleeve before he tucked it back into his sash.

"Come on," he said to his comrades. "Let's get out of here."

About the Author

Sarah Zettel is an award-winning science fiction and fantasy author. She has written nineteen novels and a roughly equal number of short stories over the past ten years in addition to founding the author cooperative Book View Cafe, practicing tai chi, learning to fiddle, marrying a rocket scientist and raising a rapidly growing son. She is very tired right now.

by Bill Slavicsek

Ampersand

What D&D Means to Me

The holiday season is upon us. No matter which metaphorical holiday pie you dip your fork into, this is the time of year when you probably get sentimental, reflective, and at least a little bit jolly. That's certainly the case with me. At a time when gift-giving and gift-receiving is on everyone's mind, I wanted to take some time to thank the Dungeons & Dragons® brand for what it has given to me over the years—and what it keeps on giving in ways that constantly surprise and delight me.

Friends, Old and New

D&D has given me the gift of friendship. From the moment I discovered the D&D game back in my teenage years, friendship has been integrally tied to the concept. Roleplaying is, after all, a social activity, and the D&D game helped strengthen and deepen the friendships I shared with those that came into and out of the game. Nothing fosters togetherness like plunging into the *Tomb of Horrors* or surviving the journey through the *Vault of the Drow*. Along the way, we learned about courage, we tested our resolve, we saw existing friendships grow stronger, we made new friends—and we had fun. A whole lot of fun.

That was then, and it's no different today. I still get together with friends every week to gab, gossip, eat good food, and play D&D. It continues to be one of the highlights of my week, one of the shining moments that I look forward to and enjoy reminiscing about well after the session ends.

For all the friends that have played D&D with me over the years, and for all those that continue to play, thanks D&D!

Something to Do

D&D has given me endless hours of entertainment. The amount of fun generated by the D&D RPG has never ceased to amaze me. For the price of a night out or the cost of a video game, a single D&D product offers countless hours of entertainment. From simply perusing books and supplements over and over to dig out the nuggets of ideas, to actually using them in a game, most D&D products provide way more hours of enjoyment than other similarly priced entertainment options. With the D&D rulebooks, dice, and a module, my friends and I are never far from filling a night or a weekend with excitement, adventure, and fun. A whole lot of fun.

For all the time you filled with magic and endless adventure, and for all the adventures still to come, thanks D&D!

All in the Mind

D&D has given me the gift of mental stimulation. The D&D RPG has sparked my imagination and creativity from the moment I discovered it, filling my head with all kinds of amazing thoughts and dreams. It has given me a place to go when daydreams are called for. It has made me use math and reading skills because I wanted to, not because a school curriculum or work assignment forced me to. It has given me mental movies way more powerful and exciting and personal than anything I've ever seen on the big screen, because I had a hand in creating them. It has given me the power to pretend, to be someone else for a time, to experience amazing adventures without actually risking life and limb.

For igniting my imagination in all kinds of ways, thanks D&D!

What does the D&D brand mean to you? Visit the D&D discussion forums to share your thoughts with us and with the D&D community.

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Hungry in Han-Over?

Not quite, but the new **D&D Gamma World RPG** expansion, *Famine in Far-Go*, goes on sale this month. If you haven't checked out the wacky game of post-apocalyptic peril and mutant madness, now's the best time to jump in! The expansion adds new hero options, supplements the rules, provides new monsters, and includes a full-length adventure.

Also available this month is *Dungeon Tiles Master Set: The Wilderness*, a box full of tiles that allow you to create encounter areas that take place in the great outdoors. The map for "The Whispering Glade" in this month's issue of *Dungeon* magazine uses only tiles from this set and *Dungeon Tiles Master Set: The Dungeon*. Check it for an example of what you can build from these tiles.

If you're looking for a good read, check the new Dungeons & Dragons novel, *The Seal of Karga Kul* by Alex Irvine. An ancient city, an ancient war, a human, and a dragonborn paladin combine to unveil a centuries-old struggle between madness and civilization.

D&D Insiders

If you're already a D&D Insider, then you've been enjoying the new web-based *D&D Character Builder*. If you're not, watch this video to see what all the fuss is about.

D&D Comics

I've talked about these before, but the new D&D comics from IDW have me really excited. Check out the IDW website for the latest news and information. And look at all the great things people are saying about the new comics (it's not just me) at these sites:

- majorspoilers.com
- comicbookresources.com
- comicsbulletin.com
- comicbookresources.com again
- kittyspryde.com

Happy Holidays!

As I draw this column and the year in general to a close, remember to give the gift of D&D this holiday season. Sure, you could check out our D&D Holiday Gift Guide for inspiration, but there are other ways to share and spread the D&D spirit. Host a game for your game group. Invite a new player or two to your game. Volunteer to run a session of *D&D Encounters* at your local game shop. And if the RPG is a little more than your group wants to handle right now, host a night of board game fun with the *D&D Castle Ravenloft* board game. It's spooky and exciting and provides a great D&D experience in about an hour of play.

From all of us here at Wizards of the Coast and the D&D R&D Team, happy holidays! We'll talk again in the new year.

Keep playing!

Arcana Lang Syne

BY SHELLY MAZZANOBLE
illustration by William O'Conner

The end of another year is upon us. I know this not because the calendar tells me so. It's because my magazine subscriptions are yelling at me to clean this! Cleanse that! Change everything!

Hey *Shape*, I already work out six days a week. And yeah, *Lucky*, I'd love to revamp my entire wardrobe to include the 379 "key pieces every woman should own." Sorry *Elle Décor*—I don't have a crawl space that I can make over into a reading room. I don't even have room to read. Look, magazines, I don't pay you to make me feel bad! My cat does that for free.

New Year's resolutions are cruel. I mean, sure, I probably do eat more sugar than the FDA thinks is appropriate. And yeah, a closet clean-out might help the whole "no room" thing. But I think I do OK. If it ain't broke, don't fix it, right?

"Do you have a New Year's resolution?" I asked Chuck and Chris, my cube neighbors.

"Nah," Chris said. "Those things are designed to make you feel bad about how well you're taking care of yourself. If I want to resolve to do something better, why wait until January 1st to do it?"

I nodded in agreement.

"I have a New Year's resolution," Chuck said. "Headphones. I'm going to get a really good pair and wear them whenever I'm at my desk."

"But then you won't hear my *Glee* recaps and cat stories!"

Oh.

I don't resolve to do anything other than wake up and remember to feed Zelda. Chris is right. If something needs changing, why wait until some magazine tells you to?

On the other hand, I do like change. But not when it comes to D&D.

There are a few things I've noticed about myself since starting our lunchtime D&D Encounters game:

- I almost always choose a pre-gen character
- I almost always choose the spell-caster
- I hate eating my lunch in front of people

Why, you ask? I don't know. I guess I'm afraid I'll have to share my food, and then I might end up hungry. I hate feeling anything but comfortably sated, (which is also why I dress in layers and always bring a backup pair of shoes when breaking in a new pair.)

Oh, wait, you mean why do I always play a wizard? I guess familiarity doesn't just breed contempt, it also

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breeds *content*. Do I really like playing a wizard or a sorcerer, or is it just what I know?

In Season One of Encounters, I came to the table late only to discover the role of spellcaster had gone to someone else.

"Do you want to be the spellcaster?" Hilary asked. "It's okay. I'll play whatever."

Hilary is very sweet and apparently psychic, because I hardly think my foot stomping and chorus of *Boooooooooooooooo* was that noticeable. But I resisted, believing it's important to step out of your comfort zone once in a while.

"You mean your competency zone," said Chuck.

"No, I mean *comfort*. I'm sure a psionic tiefling will be just as much fun as a wizard."

Enter Herteus "Bring on the Hert" Maximus. He ... well ... didn't quite live up to his name. At least not when it came to his enemies. He "hert" himself plenty—falling down a flight of spiral stairs, dropping a dagger on his foot. Low self-esteem. Psions of all races really need to watch that negative self-talk.

And then there was my short-lived affair with a human sorcerer in Season Two. Sure, I was happy to go back to my spell-casting glory days with Beercan (even if he was a dumb, old human), but that joy was tempered early on by the mere fact we were playing in Dark Sun and WE NEARLY DIED EVERY SESSION. Even Jack Bauer would have suffered in that game.

When we got the game kits for Season Three, I pulled out the pre-gens in search of the spellcaster.

"Ah, an eladrin wizard!" I said. "I shall love you and keep you and call you Berry White."

"It's Berrian," Chuck said. "I named him. I should know."

"Trust me. It's Berry White," I said, explaining once again that in addition to my role as Player-in-Chief, Zelda's lackey, and most recently "sado maso cookiest" due to my unloading thirty-seven tons of holiday cookies on R&D, I am also the Pre-Generated Character Whisperer.

"I'm like that guy, John Edward, who allows dead people to communicate with their loved ones through him. *Sara: someone whose name begins with a D, always smelled like ham and used to favor plaid shirts wants you to check behind the refrigerator. Does this make sense?* I know what the pre-gens want. They speak through me."

"But, they're not dead," Chuck responded.

"Yet," Chris called over the cube wall. Did I mention he's also our DM?

"They're not even alive," Chuck continued. "Wait. You're confusing me."

"Oh, and Berry White is female," I said. "Shows what you know."

It was right around then that Chris threw down the gauntlet. It landed with a thud on my desk.

"*Heroes of the Fallen Lands*," I noted. "I already have a copy."

"I know, but if you really want a female wizard named Berry White, then it's time for you to make one," he said. "Before our first encounter."

Ha! That's crazy talk!

"You mean, like with this book? And a pencil? Right! I actually want to play *this* season, so I think I'll just stick to the gender-confused wizard Chuck misnamed."

Chris smiled at me. Oooh, I know that smile. It's the same one he flashes in our games when we say things like "Heck yeah, we want to open that sarcophagus."

"Have you become so reliant on the Character Builder that you forgot how to roll up a character the old-fashioned way?"

"That's nuts," I said in my defense. "Everyone knows I rely on Marty to roll up my characters."

And I didn't *forget*. It's quite possible I never knew. The last character I rolled up the "old fashioned way" was Astrid, my 3.5 elf sorceress, and really my old DM did most of the work.

Chris turned away muttering, "I'm just saying ..."

Which of course translates to "Why not just play a thirty-something female Associate Brand Manager, you big chicken?"

Then I remembered what else he said—*if something needs resolving, why wait?* Could my D&D game benefit if I resolved to leave my comfort zone? This isn't about window coverings and switching to soy milk. It's about D&D! But fine. I'd do it. I'd show Chris and all the other doubters (me) that I could put a little graphite and eraser shavings into character creation. I would turn over a new leaf. And twenty-one days early, I might add. And then I got really crazy.

"I'll do you one better," I shouted after Chris. "I'll create a character, but it's not going to be a wizard."

Chris threw his hands over his heart. "Whoa! Now who's talking crazy?"

I heated up my lunch, barricaded myself in my cubicle, and got to work. Hmm ... whatever shall I play next?

Eenie meenie miney mo,

Your next character will be a...

Rogue!

(Yeah, I know that's lame. Just go with it, OK? It's the holidays.)

Interesting. I've never played a rogue, but I have been called "shifty" many times. Ten minutes later I hadn't finished my cup of peas, but my unaligned female elf thief was in my arsenal. Holy moley, I did it! I made a character using a book and a pencil.

Waving my freshly minted character sheet at Chris, I shouted, "Meet Tumbilina! She's my new rogue. Hear that? *Rogue*!

"Tumbilina? I take it she's trained in acrobatics?" Chris asked, looking over my character sheet. "Well done. So nice to meet you, Tumbilina. Kill you later."

On Wednesday, we gathered in our usual conference room, where Tumbilina met her fellow adventurers for the first time.

"Berry White was called away on important wizardly business," Chris told the group. "So you have a new friend."

"Her name is Tumbilina. Elf *thief*," I said, waiting for a reaction.

"Thief?" Laura asked. "Well, well, well."

"Wizards are so 2010," I said, waving her off. "Rogues are what's on trend."

The encounter picked up where we left off.

"You enter a large chamber," Chris began. "Dim, blue light along the Dwarven runes illuminates four alcoves. There is a huge statue of a dwarf brandishing a flail in one hand and an oversized iron key in the other."

The group was still. No one spoke. We just looked at each other and when that got awkward, at our dice, then at the map spread out on the table.

Chuck pulled out his iPhone. "Maybe there's a Twitter buff we can use." The stillness of the room made me uncomfortable and drew attention to the sound of tin foil unwrapping from my lunch.

"That good?" Brian, our fill-in mage, asked, nodding at my veggie burger.

"It's OK," I answered. Truthfully, it's fantastic—black bean veggie burger with a little tzatziki sauce, feta, and alfalfa sprouts. Yum, yum! I kind of wished I hadn't tricked it up so much, because everyone was staring at it with hungry, googly eyes.

"What?" I asked. "Do I have tzatziki on my face?"

They shook their heads.

"Well, then quit looking at my food!" I shouted. If I were a dog at the animal shelter where I do volunteer work, I would be labeled "food aggressive" and forced to eat alone in my kennel. I would prefer that.

"We're not looking at your food, Tumbles," Chuck said. "We're waiting on you to make a move."

"I'm not sharing."

"I'd rather eat this playmat than that thing," Brian said. "We want you to make a move *in the game*. You're a rogue, right?"

"Right. Of course I am! Sorry guys, I'm new at this rogue business."

OK, I told myself, *breathe*. *You can do this*. Just think, what did rogues do in my previous games? Snuck up on things. Stabbed things in the back. Unlocked doors. Disarmed traps. I could do this. Chris mentioned the dwarven statue, so I started there.

"Tumbilina wants to check out the statue," I told Chris.

Uh oh. There's that smile again.

"As soon as Tumbilina approaches, the statue comes to life, swinging its metal flail. It's going to get an opportunity attack."

"Our rogue set off a trap," Brian said. "Yeah!"

"You're like the best rogue ever," Laura said. "What are you wearing? Light-up clown shoes?"

"Take thirteen damage," Chris said. "And you slide three squares."

Three squares landed me back at the entrance where the party was standing, still waiting for their rogue to give them clearance. I imagined Tumbilina all roughed up and battered, light-up sneakers still pulsing away.

"Why hello there, Fumbilina," laughed Marty, the cleric. "Back so soon?"

Chris was really smiling then. "After the statue attacked Tumbilina, you see three iron hammerers emerge from the alcoves. And they look really, really mad."

"I'm ... uh ... bloodied, by the way," I said.

Quinn, the human fighter, went next. He activated *defender aura* on the statue. He hit.

"I'll use my long sword," Laura said, and of course rolled a 19.

No one bothered to do the math on that one. "Yeah, that'll hit," Chris said.

Marty went next. "Here's a *healing word* for you, Tumbilina. Take the change out of your pockets before you go sneaking up on things."

Whatever. I took his six hit points. And his advice, because my turn was next.

"So now that the statue is wide awake and well aware of our presence, I see no reason not to attack it."

I used my *ambush trick* and pulled out my short sword. I rolled a three.

"And she trips over a shoelace," Brian commentated.

"Do clown shoes have shoelaces?" Laura asked.

"Sure they do," said Chris. "Usually red ones." He played a clown in some high school play.

"Use *elven accuracy*," Marty stage whispered.

This time I rolled a 2. A 2! Who does that? I'm not even good at being an elf!

Then it was Brian's turn. Seeing him wedged happily in the corner, pulling *magic missiles* and *beguiling strands* out of his robes, filled me with something. *I want to blow several things up at once! I want to stand in the background! I want to use a power that has auto-hit.*

Uh oh. I had mage envy.

"How about I just stand here and make ghost sounds," Brian said. "Ooooooooohhhh ..."

"Don't make fun!" I shouted. "*Ghost sounds*, if used correctly, can be a very useful tool. Tabitha once sent a whole pack of orcs running down the staircase by scaring the pants off of them with a little old-fashioned haunting."

"Okay, okay. Won't do that." He scanned the powers on his character sheet. "How about hitting those two hammerheads with my *arc lightning*?"

Marty lit up. "*Arc lightning, go arc lightning!*" Of course the whole table joined in.

I was beside myself. "Your blasé approach to the arcane arts is disheartening. The wizard plays a very powerful and necessary role. If you can't take that seriously, then maybe someone else should play that part."

"Oh really?" Brian smiled. "Did you have anyone in mind?"

"No," I said. "Not really."

Later in the encounter, Tumbilina tried to steal the key from the statue, but the eight I rolled meant she overshot the distance and face-planted in a pile of rubble. Chris only doled out six points of damage. I'm pretty sure it should have been more.

"Aren't you trained in Acrobatics?" Laura asked.

"And Thievery?" added Brian.

"Are you guys trained in being jerks?" Jeez. Can't a rogue have a bad day?

Tumbilina finished the encounter prone. Yes. I was *that* awesome.

Chris and I returned to our desks, where we sit separated by a six-inch wall.

"You know," he said, "sometimes the dice don't do you any favors."

"Well yours always seem indebted to you," I noted. Once he scored four critical hits in one encounter!

"Maybe a rogue's not the right role for you," he continued. "Just like not everyone is meant to be a wizard."

Ain't that the truth!

"Not to get all blamey, but I totally would have done an Arcana check as soon as we got into the chamber," I said.

"And if you did, you totally would have noticed the statue reeked of magic and would likely attack the party if you got too close."

I was reminded of something someone very wise once wrote*—*If it ain't broke, don't fix it.*

So, Tumbilina might not have been the sneakiest of rogues, but it was a fun experiment. I came. I saw. I set off a trap.

"Next week, I think I'll go back to my mage roots," I said.

"That," Chris smiled, "is an excellent idea."

**see above*

About the Author

Shelly Mazzanoble resolves to be the best wizard in the whole, wide world. And maybe clean out her closets.

D&D Alumni
Barrier Peaks

By Bart Carroll
Illustration by Bill Willingham

Far-Go is dying . . . the people are afraid . . . the animals are wasting away . . . the crops are withering in the fields. No one, not even the powerful high priest, Arx Skystone, knows what has caused Far-Go's misfortune.

As we've mentioned, we have a good reason to release *Famine in Far-Go* and *Legion of Gold* for *D&D Gamma World*: These were the first adventures for the original edition of the game. The latest *Famine in Far-Go*, which comes out this month, has seen significant story alterations. These alterations include influences from another adventure, as well. This adventure is the most famous science-fiction adventure of all time, in fact—at least, in the context of the Dungeons & Dragons® game.

Today, we look at the original *Famine in Far-Go*, as well as how *Expedition to the Barrier Peaks* impacts the new version, and ways you might now run *Barrier Peaks* in your D&D campaign. It's *Gamma World*, after all, so anything is possible . . . but definitely weird.

The Original Famine in Far-Go

As can be expected from the original adventure module, there's a famine, in Far-Go, and the heroes are tasked with finding its salvation. A fair bit of railroading takes place in terms of the heroes' shared origins: They're youths sent out from their community on a Rite of Adulthood. This Rite happens to involve investigating a meteor crash (well, meteorite, at that point) that appears to have caused the famine. The heroes visit a chicken processing factory along the way. The place is the lair of the famed one-eyed mutant chickens: the gallus gallus. (A more comprehensive summary can be read at the inimitable grognardia.com).

Of more interest to me personally was the wilderness encounter along the way with a pack of badders (or would that be a cete of badders?) who worship an image of University of Wisconsin's mascot, Bucky Badger—their supreme deity and protector. I attended UW myself, and with TSR based nearby in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, they must have appreciated the

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in-joke. I'd also like to point out that at the time of writing, UW has just knocked off #1 Ohio State and #15 Iowa in back-to-back wins. (Update: and has since been invited to the Rose Bowl.) Before anyone from Ohio or Iowa disparages that accomplishment, be warned that this would bring down the wrath of the entire pack of badders.

Success in the original adventure hinged on defeating the gallus gallus and supplying the processing factory's computer with fuel from the meteorite. The computer, in turn, would supply Far-Go with (what else?) a 6-month supply of processed chicken patties, thus ending the famine. Exploring the factory to defeat the gallus gallus involved use of color-coded ID cards, necessary to enter different parts of the facility. Which sounds like another sci-fi adventure (which we'll get to in just a moment).

The Original Ship

The original *Barrier Peaks* ship was also populated by a number of creatures, including will-o'-wisps and displacer beasts—suitably alien, since both were also encountered in A.E. van Vogt's 1950 novel *The Voyage of the Space Beagle* (yes, that's a pun on Darwin's ship, the *HMS Beagle*; and yes, both were also an influence on *Dragon*'s *Voyage of the Princess Ark* . . . there's a lot of circularity in this month's article). Displacer beasts greatly resembled the novel's coeurl, not to mention (in this author's humble opinion) *Avatar*'s recent 6-limbed, pantherlike thanators.

A New Famine in Far-Go

Without spoiling too much of the adventure, the new version of *Famine in Far-Go* still features a famine . . . in Far-Go. This time, the meteorite has changed to a crashed spaceship that has released a host of horrors, including russet mold, vegepygmies, and the dread froghemoth.

Which sounds like that sci-fi adventure again. . . .

Yes, as even designer Robert Schwalb has admitted, this *Famine in Far-Go* allowed him to bring elements of *Expedition to the Barrier Peaks* back into the game.

Expedition to the Barrier Peaks

And here we come to the adventure that many remember for bringing sci-fi to D&D. In our interview with James M. Ward, he discussed the intersection between *Barrier Peaks* and *Metamorphosis Alpha*—an intersection specifically laid out in the opening of *Barrier Peaks*' re-release:

This module was begun early in 1976 when TSR was contemplating publication of a science fantasy role playing game. Jim Ward had already shown us some rough notes on *Metamorphosis Alpha*. I thought it would be a splendid idea to introduce Jim's game at Origins II, and introduce the concept to D&D players by means of the tournament scenario. I laid out the tournament from old "Greyhawk Castle" campaign material involving a spaceship, and Rob Kuntz helped me to populate the ruined vessel. Both this scenario and *Metamorphosis Alpha* proved successful, but while the latter has been continually available since mid-1976, only a few copies of the tournament dungeon used for Origins II have been around. *Metamorphosis Alpha* is currently being rewritten and expanded for a major new edition, and (the) *Gamma World* game is highly popular too. Since this module offers a unique and challenging blend of fantasy and science fantasy role playing, it seemed logical to reintroduce it to the public.

You can see quite a collision of influences within *Barrier Peaks*. It too featured colored cards used to access various parts of the ship. Scattered throughout the ship were creatures associated with *Metamorphosis Alpha* (lizardoids, baboonoids, mad robots), the more alien creatures of Dungeons & Dragons (a Swamp Thing/Man-Thing-esque shambling mound, an intellect devourer—and what could be more alien than a mind flayer?), and even some classics of D&D (a bulette, umber hulk, and even trappers, lurkers above, and rot grub . . . or gotcha, gotcha, and gotcha, respectively).

I would argue that the sheer joy and nostalgia surrounding *Expedition to the Barrier Peaks* never came from the design of the ship itself (a leveled, open-ended affair) or from the storyline (there wasn't one). Arguably, there was that single mind flayer near the end, but he hardly constituted an epic villain to conquer. The adventure itself ended abruptly with the heroes being unceremoniously dumped out of the cargo hold along with a dazed bulette—hilariously illustrated, but not the most dramatic of conclusions.

Rather, enjoyment came from the simple thrill of exploring a spaceship in a Dungeons & Dragons game, searching for the different colored cards to access the different sections, and—best of all—figuring out how to use the advanced weaponry against a strange host of robots and creatures.

All of which can be replicated in your game.

Crashing Spaceships into D&D

We've belabored this analogy (yet still use it): *Barrier Peaks* crashed sci-fi into D&D's fantasy. If you're looking to do the same, the following presents a few ideas for how to accomplish it. It's ground we've covered before, but still love to consider.

The Premise

Much like we stated in *Against the Cult of the Reptile God*, a faithful recreation of the original adventure is less useful than using the adventure as a template. "Barrier Peaks" as a place and adventure concept can be placed anywhere you wish in your world. A mysterious ship has crashed somewhere in the mountains of your world, slightly buried over time until its entrance resembles that of any other cave—until your players' characters are called to investigate and quickly realize this adventure is going to be different.

You might even start with the original premise; to paraphrase:

A local duchy has recently been plagued by a rash of unusually weird and terrible monsters of unknown sort. This western area, particularly the mountain fastness bordering the duchy (known as the Barrier Peaks), has long been renowned for the generation of the most fearsome beasts, and it has been shunned accordingly.

Within the last few months, however, a walled town not far distant from the area, and four small fortresses as well, were destroyed by mysterious attacks! The remaining barons and lords have preserved in brine several partially decomposed corpses found on or near the sites of the ravaging. While these strange bodies are assumed to have belonged to the forces which were responsible for the destruction, the remains were too far gone to learn anything other than they were of creatures heretofore unknown to even the wisest sages. The urgent plea for aid which accompanied these gruesome corpses could not be ignored.

It has been learned that several unconfirmed reports have related that monsters have been disgorged from a gated cave at random intervals. The entrance to this place is high upon a rocky face, and sheathed in armor. This protection has purportedly frustrated all attempts to explore the space beyond the metal valve—although several search parties have entirely disappeared, so it is possible they entered but never returned. Your expedition must find out exactly what this cave is, what is causing the monsters to come forth, who is responsible, and how to prevent future incursions. In addition, any other information regarding this mysterious locale, its strange denizens, magical devices, or unusual weaponry is highly desirable.

Your party set forth a week ago, and for the past two days have been climbing higher into the crags of the Barrier Peaks. Last night was spent in the keep of the only baron remaining in the area—and he was fulsome glad for your company. This morning, as the eastern horizon turned from pearl gray to rosy pink, a score of the baron's retainers guided the expedition towards the unknown area. It is now afternoon, and you have set up camp in a hidden dell but a few bowshots from the strange entrance. The men-at-arms have been detailed to guard the supplies and mounts at the camp while you go onward immediately. They will await your return for four full days before returning to the keep.

Gathering your personal gear, you are now climbing the steep slope of the dell's north side, passing the rim, and forcing your way through a dense growth of trees and undergrowth. There, across a field and beyond a rocky rise, awaits adventure. . . .

The Ship

To recreate the interior of the spaceship, plunder freely from the *Gamma World* poster maps, supplemented by dungeon tiles (dungeon corridors standing in for metal hallways of the crashed ship; round tower pieces from the *Arcane Towers* set serving for rooms bordering the ship's hull). This also works especially well using *Star Wars Galaxy Tiles*.

Using your maps and tiles, caves and caverns can become large gardens, zoological decks, and other open spaces. *d20 Modern*'s *Critical Locations* featured a wealth of maps that you can use for interior pieces, since the original ship featured libraries, game rooms, gymnasiums, a large theater and auditorium—even bars and cocktail lounges (those aliens flew in style).

Populate these areas as you see fit, assuming that D&D creatures once contained on the zoological deck have broken free. Naturally, pilfer freely from the new *Gamma World* material, as well. Along with robots, *Famine in Far-Go* provides statistics for the vegepygmies, the froghemoth, and zombified creatures infected with russet mold—and these monster stats are completely compatible for D&D adventures. You even have stats for "visitors" in case you wish to include aliens that have somehow survived in stasis (and might be freed by the characters—inadvertently or otherwise).

Those Wonderful Toys

Let's get to the part of *Barrier Peaks* that players remember best of all—finding those wonderful sci-fi weapons and armor. This is also fairly easy to recreate: *Gamma World*, with its compatible rules, provides the tools to help do so. Instead of the usual treasure parcels, place Omega Tech cards around the ship; they replicate many of the items from *Barrier Peaks*: blaster rifles, ray guns, energy weapons—and, of course—power armor. You can also add several advanced suits, including the heavy-lift harness (coincidentally showcased in *Nodwick*'s lampooning of *Barrier Peaks*). Plus, since this is a crashed ship with potentially leaking fuels and hazards, it seems like a perfect excuse to also introduce Alpha Mutation cards (and the mechanics of Alpha Flux) as well.

In the original *Barrier Peaks* (and *Gamma World* as well), sci-fi items required a byzantine process to figure out their use, occasionally resulting in the death of the user. These items were also limited by their number of charges. Although Omega Tech items are balanced in game terms (albeit slightly at the higher end), you might wish to employ similar methods to discourage their general infiltration into your campaign. Perhaps, as with drow gear that once dissipated in sunlight, *Barrier Peaks*' items function only within the ship (where a stasis field keeps them constantly charged).

Then again—and we'd like to end on this, emphatically—the point of *Expedition to the Barrier Peaks* has always been a break from the norm. We say you should let your characters find and use these items freely, at least within the context of the adventure. Let them experience mutations aboard the ship.

If you're planning to run a *Barrier Peaks*-style game, have fun with it. We would love to hear how it goes. As an added challenge, we're also providing the stats for the original *power armor*, the most coveted item in the entire adventure. The armor offered so many tricks that it's impossible to express with a single Alpha Tech card. However, if you have a write-up of your own for the suit, we'd love to see it; send your *power armor* design to dndinsider@wizards.com, and we'll publish our favorite!

About the Author

Bart Carroll is neither the result of genetic experimentation by some insane wizard, nor a nightmarish creature loathsome beyond description (though he has been called both); a medium natural humanoid, he joined Wizards of the Coast in the spring of 2004. Originally producing their licensed property websites (including *Star Wars* and G.I. Joe), he transitioned to the D&D website, where he's remained part of the D&D Insider Team. In this role, he generates website content in support of the 4th Edition line of products, the online magazines, and the gamer lifestyle—of which he is an extremely proud adherent.